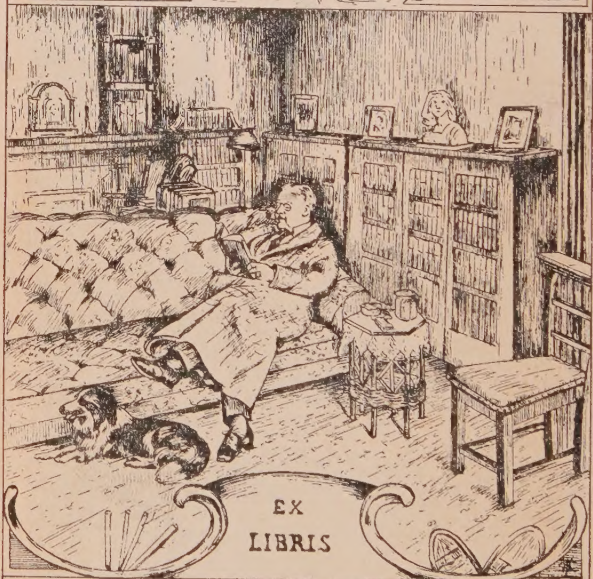


THE
THREE
MUSKETEERS
VOL. II
▼
ALEXANDRE
DUMAS



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THE THREE MUSKETEERS

BY
ALEXANDRE DUMAS



*CAREFULLY TRANSLATED FROM THE LATEST
FRENCH EDITION*

VOLUME II

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
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1922

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MILADY.

CHAPTER XXX.

MILADY.

D'ARTAGNAN had followed milady, without being perceived by her. He saw her get into her carriage, and heard her order the coachman to drive to St. Germain.

It was useless to endeavor to keep pace on foot with a carriage drawn by two powerful horses. So D'Artagnan returned to the Rue Férou.

In the Rue de Seine he met Planchet, who had stopped before a bake-shop, and was contemplating with ecstasy a cake of the most appetizing appearance.

He ordered him to go and saddle two horses in M. de Tréville's stables, one for himself, D'Artagnan, and one for Planchet, and to come and meet him at Athos's, — M. de Tréville having once for all given D'Artagnan the freedom of his stables.

Planchet proceeded toward the Rue du Colombier, and D'Artagnan toward the Rue Férou. Athos was at home, emptying in solitary sadness a bottle of the famous Spanish wine he had brought back with him from his journey into

Picardy. He made a sign to Grimaud to bring a glass for D'Artagnan, and Grimaud obeyed, silent as usual.

D'Artagnan related to Athos all that had passed at the church between Porthos and the *procureuse*, and how their comrade was probably by that time in a fair way to be equipped.

"As for me," said Athos, in comment on this recital, "I am quite at my ease; women are not going to defray the expense of my equipment."

"And yet, handsome, well-bred, great noble as you are, my dear Athos, neither princesses nor queens would be safe from your amorous darts."

"How young this D'Artagnan is!" said Athos, shrugging his shoulders, and making a sign to Grimaud to bring another bottle.

At that moment Planchet put his head modestly in at the half-open door, and told his master that the horses were ready.

"What horses?" asked Athos.

"Two horses that M. de Tréville lends me for a ride, and with which I am now going to make an excursion to St. Germain."

"Well, and what are you going to do at St. Germain?" asked Athos.

Then D'Artagnan described the meeting which he had had at the church, and how he had once more found the lady who, like the noble with the black cloak and a scar near his temple, was ever on his mind.

"That is to say, you are in love with this lady as you were with Madame Bonacieux," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, as if he pitied human weakness.

"I? Not at all!" said D'Artagnan; "I am only curious to unravel the mystery in which she is involved. I do not know why, but I have a strong feeling that this woman, though she is perfectly unknown to me, and though I am unknown to her, has an influence over my life."

"Well, you are right," said Athos; "I do not know a woman worth the trouble of being sought for when once she is lost. Madame Bonacieux is lost, so much the worse for her; let her find herself."

"No, Athos, no, you are mistaken," said D'Artagnan; "I love my poor Constance more than ever, and if I knew the place where she is, were it at the end of the world, I would go and free her from the hands of her enemies. But I cannot find out where she is — all my researches have proved in

vain. What can you expect? I must divert my attention by something!"

"Amuse yourself, then, with milady, my dear D'Artagnan. I wish you may with all my heart, if that can amuse you."

"Hear me, Athos," said D'Artagnan; "instead of shutting yourself up here as if you were under arrest, get on horseback, and come and take a ride with me to St. Germain."

"My dear fellow," said Athos, "I ride a horse when I have one, otherwise I go on foot."

"Well, for my part," said D'Artagnan, smiling at Athos's misanthropy, which from any other person would certainly have offended him, "I am not so proud as you are, my dear Athos. I ride what I can get. So good-by."

"Good-by," said the musketeer, making a sign to Grimaud to uncork the bottle he had just brought.

D'Artagnan and Planchet got into the saddle, and took the road to St. Germain.

As he rode along, what Athos had said respecting Madame Bonacieux recurred to the young man's mind. Although D'Artagnan was not of a very sentimental turn, the mercer's pretty wife had made a real impression on his heart. As he said, he was ready to go to the end of the world to seek her. But, as the world is round, it has many ends, so that he did not know in which direction to turn.

In the meantime, he was going to try to find out who milady was. Milady had spoken to the man in the black cloak, therefore she knew him. Now, in D'Artagnan's opinion it was certainly the man in the black cloak who had carried off Madame Bonacieux the second time, as he had carried her off the first. D'Artagnan then only told half a lie, which is lying but little, when he said that by going in search of milady he was at the same time going in search of Constance.

Thinking of all this, and from time to time giving his horse a touch of the spur, D'Artagnan completed his journey, and arrived at St. Germain. He had just passed by the pavilion in which ten years later Louis XIV. was to be born. He was riding along a very quiet street, gazing right and left to see whether he could find any trace of his beautiful Englishwoman, when from the ground floor of a pretty house, which, according to the fashion of the time, had no window on the street, he saw a form appear that looked familiar. This person in question was walking along a kind of terrace, ornamented with flowers. Planchet recognized who it was first.

"Eh! sir!" said he, addressing D'Artagnan, "don't you remember that face gaping yonder?"

"No," said D'Artagnan; "and yet I am certain I have seen it before."

"By Jove! I believe you have," said Planchet; "why, it is poor Lubin, the lackey of the Comte de Wardes, whom you so well accommodated a month ago at Calais, on the road to the governor's country house!"

"So it is!" said D'Artagnan; "I know him now. Do you think he would recollect you?"

"'Pon my word, sir, he was so greatly disturbed that I don't think he can have retained a very clear recollection of me."

"Well, go and get into conversation with him, and find out, if you can, whether his master is dead or not."

Planchet dismounted and went straight up to Lubin, who did not recognize him, and the two lackeys began to chat with the best understanding possible, while D'Artagnan turned the two horses into a lane, and went round the house so as to be present at the conference, coming back to take his place behind a hedge of hazels.

After a moment's watching from behind the hedge he heard the noise of a carriage, and saw milady's coach stop in front of him. He could not be mistaken — milady was in it. D'Artagnan bent over on his horse's neck in order to see everything without being seen.

Milady put her charming fair head out at the windòw, and gave some orders to her maid.

The latter, a pretty girl of about twenty years of age, active and lively, the typical soubrette for a great lady, jumped down from the step — on which, according to the custom of the time, she was seated — and went toward the terrace where D'Artagnan had perceived Lubin.

D'Artagnan followed the maid with his eyes, and saw her going toward the terrace. But it happened that some one in the house had called Lubin, so that Planchet remained alone, looking in all directions for D'Artagnan.

The maid approached Planchet, whom she took for Lubin, and holding out a little note to him:

"For your master," said she.

"For my master?" replied Planchet, in astonishment.

"Yes, and very urgent. Take it quick."

Thereupon, she ran toward the carriage, which had turned round in the direction it had come; she jumped on the step, and the carriage drove off.

Planchet turned the note over and over; then, accustomed to passive obedience, he jumped down from the terrace, ran through the lane, and at the end of twenty paces met D'Artagnan, who, having seen all, was coming to him.

"For you, sir," said Planchet, presenting the note to the young man.

"For me!" said D'Artagnan; "are you sure of that?"

"Zounds! sir, I can't be more sure. The maid said for your master. I have no other master but you; so — a pretty little lass, 'pon my word, that maid!"

D'Artagnan opened the letter and read these words:

"A person who takes more interest in you than she is willing to confess wishes to know on what day you will be in condition to walk in the forest? To-morrow, at the Hôtel Field of the Cloth of Gold. A lackey in black and red will wait for your reply."

"Oh! ho!" said D'Artagnan, "this is rather lively. It appears that milady and I are anxious about the health of the same person. Well, Planchet, how is our good M. de Wardes! He is not dead, then?"

"Oh, no, monsieur, he is as well as a man can be with four sword-wounds in his body; for you, without question, inflicted four upon the dear gentleman, and he is still very weak, having lost almost all his blood. As I told you, Lubin did not know me, and he related to me our adventure from one end to the other."

"Well done, Planchet! you are the king of lackeys. Now jump up on your horse, and let us overtake the carriage."

This they soon did. At the end of five minutes they perceived the carriage drawn up by the roadside. A cavalier richly dressed, was close to the coach door.

The conversation between milady and the cavalier was so animated that D'Artagnan stopped on the other side of the carriage without any one but the pretty maid being aware of his presence.

The conversation took place in English — a language which D'Artagnan could not understand; but, by the accent, the young man plainly saw that the beautiful Englishwoman was in a great rage. She terminated it by a gesture which left no doubt as to the nature of this conversation — this was a blow with her fan, applied with such force that the little feminine weapon flew into a thousand pieces.

The cavalier broke into a loud laugh, which appeared to exasperate milady.

D'Artagnan thought this was the moment to interfere; he approached the other door, and taking off his hat respectfully:

"Madame," said he, "will you permit me to offer you my services? This cavalier seems to have made you very angry. Speak one word, madame, and I will take it on myself to punish him for his lack of courtesy."

At the first word milady turned round, looking at the young man in astonishment; and when he had finished:

"Sir," said she, in very good French, "I should with great confidence place myself under your protection, if the person who is picking a quarrel with me were not my brother."

"Ah! excuse me, then," said D'Artagnan; "you must be aware that I was ignorant of that, madame!"

"What is that presumptuous fellow troubling himself about?" cried the cavalier, whom milady had designated as her brother, stooping down to the height of the coach window, "and why does he not go on?"

"Presumptuous fellow yourself!" said D'Artagnan, also bending down on his horse's neck and answering through the carriage window. "I do not go on, because it pleases me to stop here."

The cavalier addressed some words in English to his sister.

"I speak to you in French," said D'Artagnan; "be kind enough, then, to reply to me in the same language. You are madame's brother: be it so, but, fortunately, you are not mine."

You might think that milady, timid as women are in general, would have interposed at this beginning of mutual provocations, in order to prevent the quarrel from going too far. But, on the contrary, she threw herself back in her carriage, and called out coolly to the coachman, "Drive home!"

The pretty maid cast an anxious glance at D'Artagnan, whose good looks seemed to have produced an impression on her.

The carriage went on and left the two men face to face, no material obstacle separating them any longer.

The cavalier made a movement as if to follow the carriage, but D'Artagnan, whose anger, already excited, was much increased by recognizing in him the Englishman of Amiens, who had won his horse and had come very near

winning his diamond from Athos, caught at his bridle and stopped him.

"Well, sir!" said he; "you appear to be more presumptuous than I am, for you forget there is a little quarrel to arrange between us."

"Ah! ha!" said the Englishman; "is it you, my master? Must you, then, always be playing some game or other?"

"Yes; and that reminds me that I have a revenge to take. We will see, my dear sir, if you can handle a sword as skillfully as you can a dice-box."

"You see well enough that I have no sword," said the Englishman. "Do you wish to play the braggart with an unarmed man?"

"I hope you have a sword at home," replied D'Artagnan; "but, at all events, I have two, and, if you like, I will throw with you for one of them."

"Quite unnecessary," said the Englishman; "I am well furnished with such sorts of playthings."

"Very well, my worthy gentleman!" replied D'Artagnan; "pick out the longest, and come and show it to me this evening."

"Where?"

"Behind the Luxembourg. That's a charming place for such strolls as the one I propose to you."

"Very well, I will be there."

"Your hour?"

"Six o'clock."

"By the way, you probably have one or two friends?"

"Yes, I have three who would be greatly honored by joining in the game with me."

"Three? That's fortunate! That fits exactly," cried D'Artagnan. "It is just my number!"

"Now, then, who are you?" asked the Englishman.

"I am M. d'Artagnan, a Gascon gentleman, serving in the guards, in the company of M. des Essarts. And you?"

"I am Lord Winter, Baron of Sheffield."

"Well, then, I am your servant, baron," said D'Artagnan, "though your names are rather difficult to remember."

And touching his horse with the spur, he galloped back to Paris.

As he was accustomed to do on such occasions, D'Artagnan went straight to the residence of Athos.

He found Athos reclining upon a large sofa, waiting, as he said, for his equipment to come and find him.

He related to Athos all that had just passed except the letter to M. de Wardes.

Athos was delighted to hear that he was going to fight an Englishman. We have said that was his dream.

They immediately sent their lackeys for Porthos and Aramis, and made them acquainted with the affair in hand.

Porthos drew his sword from the scabbard, and began to make passes at the wall, springing back from time to time, and making bends like a dancer.

Aramis, who was constantly at work on his poem, shut himself up in Athos's closet, and begged not to be disturbed until the moment of drawing swords.

Athos, by signs, desired Grimaud to bring another bottle of wine.

And D'Artagnan employed himself in arranging a little plan, the carrying out of which we shall see later on, and which promised him an agreeable adventure, as might be seen by the smiles which from time to time passed over his countenance, lighting up his thoughtful expression.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH.

THE hour having come, they repaired, with their four lackeys, to a yard behind the Luxembourg where goats were kept. Athos threw a piece of money to the goat-keeper to withdraw. The lackeys were charged to act as sentinels.

A silent party soon drew near to the same enclosure, came into it, and joined the musketeers. Then, according to English custom, the presentations took place.

The Englishmen were all men of the highest rank; consequently their adversaries' extraordinary names were, for them, not only a matter of surprise, but of uneasiness.

"But, after all," said Lord Winter, when the three friends had been named, "we do not know who you are, and we are not going to fight against such names; why, they are shepherds' names."

"Therefore, as you may suppose, milord, they are only assumed names," said Athos.

"That only gives us the greater desire to know your names," replied the Englishman.

"You gambled very willingly with us without knowing our

names," said Athos, "as is plain by your having won our two horses."

"That is true, but we then only risked our pistoles; this time we risk our lives. Men play with anybody, but fight only with equals."

"You are right," said Athos, and he took aside the one of the four Englishmen with whom he was to fight, and whispered his name.

Porthos and Aramis did the same.

"Does that satisfy you?" said Athos to his adversary; "do you think me sufficiently noble to do me the honor of crossing swords with me?"

"Yes, sir," said the Englishman, bowing.

"Well, now, shall I tell you another thing?" asked Athos, coolly.

"What is that?" demanded the Englishman.

"That you would have done as well not to require me to make myself known."

"Why so?"

"Because I am believed to be dead, and I have reasons for wishing nobody should know that I am alive, so that I shall be obliged to kill you to prevent my secret getting out."

The Englishman looked at Athos, believing that he was joking, but Athos was not joking the least in the world.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, addressing at the same time his companions and their adversaries, "are we ready?"

"Yes!" answered the Englishmen and the Frenchmen, as with one voice.

"On guard, then!" cried Athos.

And immediately eight swords glittered in the rays of the setting sun, and the combat began with an animosity very natural to men who were twofold enemies.

Athos fought with as much calmness and method as if he had been fencing in a school.

Porthos, cured, no doubt, of his too great confidence by his adventure at Chantilly, parried with skill and prudence.

Aramis, who had the third canto of his poem to finish, made quick work, like a man pressed for time.

Athos killed his adversary first. He gave him but one blow, but, as he had foretold him, that blow was mortal — the sword passed through his heart.

Porthos next stretched his opponent on the grass, with a wound through his thigh. Then, as the Englishman, without

making any further resistance, surrendered his sword, Porthos took him up in his arms and carried him to his carriage.

Aramis pushed his so vigorously that, after retreating fifty paces, he at last ran away as fast as he could go, and disappeared amid the hooting of the lackeys.

As to D'Artagnan, he fought purely and simply on the defensive. Then when he saw his adversary pretty well fatigued, with a vigorous side-thrust he knocked his sword from his grasp. The baron, finding himself disarmed, retreated two or three paces, but at this moment his foot slipped and he fell backward.

D'Artagnan was on him at a bound, and placing his sword on his throat —

"I could kill you, sir," said he to the Englishman; "you are quite at my mercy, but I spare your life for your sister's sake."

D'Artagnan was overjoyed. He had just realized the plan which he had conceived, the development of which had occasioned the smiles we mentioned.

The Englishman, delighted at having to do with such a generous gentleman, pressed D'Artagnan in his arms and paid a thousand compliments to the three musketeers, and, as Porthos's adversary was already installed in the carriage, and as Aramis's had run away, they had nothing to think about but the dead man.

As Porthos and Aramis were undressing him in the hope of finding his wound not mortal, a large purse dropped from his belt. D'Artagnan picked it up and held it out to Lord Winter.

"What the devil shall I do with that?" asked the Englishman.

"You can restore it to his family," said D'Artagnan.

"His family will care vastly about such a trifle as that! They will inherit fifteen thousand louis a year from him. Keep the purse for your lackeys."

D'Artagnan put the purse into his pocket.

"And now, my young friend, for you will permit me, I hope, to call you by that name," said Lord Winter, "on this very evening, if agreeable to you, I will present you to my sister, Lady Clarick. For I am desirous that she in her turn should take you into her good graces; and as she is in favor at court, perhaps, in the future, a word spoken by her might prove useful to you."

D'Artagnan reddened with pleasure and bowed his assent.

Meanwhile Athos had come up to D'Artagnan:

"What are you going to do with that purse?" whispered he.

"Why, I meant to pass it over to you, my dear Athos."

"To me! Why to me?"

"Why, you killed him, didn't you? They are the spoils of victory."

"I inherit from an enemy!" said Athos. "What do you take me for?"

"It is the custom in war," said D'Artagnan. "Why should it not be the custom in a duel?"

"Even on the field of battle I have never done that."

Porthos shrugged his shoulders. Aramis by a movement of his lips applauded Athos's opinion.

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "let us give the money to the lackeys, as Lord Winter desired us to do."

"Yes," said Athos, "let us give the money to the lackeys, but not to our lackeys, to the Englishmen's lackeys."

Athos took the purse and threw it into the coachman's hand —

"For you and your comrades," said he.

This lordly way of doing things in a man who was entirely destitute struck even Porthos, and this story of French generosity, repeated by Lord Winter and his friend, was highly applauded by every one except MM. Grimaud, Bazin, Mousqueton, and Planchet.

Lord Winter, on quitting D'Artagnan, gave him his sister's address. She lived No. 6 Place Royale, then the fashionable quarter. Moreover he promised to call and get him in order to present him. D'Artagnan appointed eight o'clock at Athos's residence.

This introduction to milady fully occupied our Gascon's thoughts. He remembered in what a strange manner this woman had hitherto been mixed up in his destiny. According to his conviction, she was one of the cardinal's creatures, and yet he felt himself irresistibly drawn toward her by one of those sentiments for which we cannot account. His only fear was that milady would recognize in him the man of Meung and of Dover. Then she knew that he was one of M. de Tréville's friends, and consequently that he belonged body and soul to the king, which would instantly make him lose a part of his advantage, because as soon as he became known to milady as he knew her, he played only an equal game with her. Our presumptuous hero gave but little heed to the intrigue already begun between her and M. de Wardes, although

the marquis was young, handsome, rich, and high in the cardinal's favor. Not for nothing are we twenty years old, particularly if we are born at Tarbes.

D'Artagnan went straight home and made a brilliant toilet. Then he returned to Athos's, and, as his custom was, told him everything. Athos listened attentively to his projects; then shook his head, and with a shade of bitterness recommended prudence to him.

"What!" said he; "you have just lost one woman, who, you say, was good, charming, perfect, and here you are already running after another!"

D'Artagnan felt the truth of this reproach.

"I loved Madame Bonacieux with my heart, while I only love milady with my head," said he. "By getting introduced to her, my principal object is to ascertain what part she plays at court."

"The part she plays at court, by Jove, is not difficult to divine after all you have told me. She is some emissary of the cardinal's, a woman who will draw you into a snare in which you will leave your head for good and all."

"The devil! my dear Athos, you view things on the dark side, it seems to me."

"D'Artagnan, I mistrust women, — can it be otherwise? I bought my experience dearly, — particularly fair women. Milady is fair, you say?"

"She has the most beautiful light hair imaginable!"

"Ah! my poor D'Artagnan!" exclaimed Athos.

"Listen. I want to be enlightened on a certain subject. Then, when I shall have learned what I desire to know, I will withdraw."

"Be enlightened!" said Athos, phlegmatically.

Lord Winter arrived at the appointed time, but Athos, being warned of his coming, went into the other chamber. The Englishman accordingly found D'Artagnan alone, and as it was nearly eight o'clock, he took the young man with him.

An elegant coach below, drawn by two excellent horses, was waiting; they were soon at the Place Royale.

Milady Clarick received D'Artagnan seriously. Her hôtel was remarkably sumptuous; and, while most of the English on account of the war had left, or were about to leave, France, milady had just been laying out much money upon her residence. This proved that the general measures which sent the English home did not affect her.

"You see," said Lord Winter, presenting D'Artagnan to his

sister, "a young gentleman who has held my life in his hands, and who has not abused his advantage, although we were doubly enemies, since it was I who insulted him, and since I am an Englishman. Thank him then, madame, if you have any affection for me."

Milady frowned slightly; a scarcely visible cloud passed over her brow, and such a peculiar smile appeared on her lips that the young man, observing this triple shade, almost shuddered at it.

The brother saw nothing. He had turned round to play with milady's favorite monkey, which had pulled him by the doublet.

"You are welcome, sir," said milady, in a voice the singular sweetness of which contrasted with the symptoms of ill-humor which D'Artagnan had just remarked; "you have to-day acquired eternal rights to my gratitude."

The Englishman then turned round and described the combat without omitting a single detail. Milady listened with the greatest attention, and yet it was easy to see that, in spite of her efforts to conceal her impressions, this recital was not agreeable to her. The blood mounted to her face, and her foot moved impatiently beneath her dress.

Lord Winter perceived nothing of this. When he had finished, he went to a table on which was a salver with Spanish wine and glasses. He filled two and by a sign invited D'Artagnan to drink.

D'Artagnan knew that an Englishman regards as an insult the refusal to drink his health. He therefore went to the table and took the second glass. He did not, however, lose sight of milady, and in a mirror perceived the change that had just taken place in her face. Now that she believed herself to be no longer observed, a sentiment like ferocity animated her countenance. She bit her handkerchief with all her might.

The pretty little maid whom D'Artagnan had already observed then came in. She spoke some words in English, to Lord Winter, who immediately requested D'Artagnan's permission to retire, excusing himself on account of the urgency of the business that called him away, and charging his sister to obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan shook hands with Lord Winter, and then returned to milady. Her countenance, with surprising mobility, had recovered its gracious expression.

The conversation took a cheerful turn. She told D'Artagnan

that Lord Winter was only her brother-in-law, and not ~~her~~ brother. She had married a younger brother of the family, who had left her a widow with one child. This child was Lord Winter's sole heir, if Lord Winter did not marry. All this showed D'Artagnan that there was a veil hiding something, but he could not yet see under this veil.

Moreover, after half an hour's conversation, D'Artagnan was convinced that milady was his compatriot. She spoke French with a purity and an elegance that left no doubt on that head.

He was profuse in gallant speeches and protestations of devotion. To all the nonsense which escaped our Gascon, milady replied with a smile of kindness. The hour for retiring arrived. D'Artagnan took leave of milady, and left the parlor the happiest of men.

On the stairs he met the pretty maid, who brushed gently against him as she passed, and then, blushing to the eyes, asked his pardon for having touched him, in so sweet a voice that the pardon was granted instantly.

D'Artagnan came again on the morrow, and was even better received than on the day before. Lord Winter was not at home, and milady this time did all the honors of the evening. She appeared to take a great interest in him, and asked him where he was from, who were his friends, and whether he had not at some times thought of attaching himself to the cardinal.

D'Artagnan, who, as we have said, was exceedingly prudent for a young man of twenty, then remembered his suspicions regarding milady. He launched into a eulogy of his Eminence, and said that he should not have failed to enlist in the cardinal's guards, instead of the king's, if he had only known M. de Cavois instead of M. de Tréville.

Milady changed the conversation without any appearance of affectation, and asked D'Artagnan, in the most careless manner possible, if he had never been in England.

D'Artagnan replied that he had been sent there by M. de Tréville, to bargain for some new horses, and that he had even brought back four as specimens.

At the same hour as on the preceding evening D'Artagnan retired. In the corridor he again met the pretty Kitty; that was the maid's name. She looked at him with an expression of good-will which it was impossible to mistake. But D'Artagnan was so preoccupied by her mistress that he noticed absolutely nothing which did not come from her.

D'Artagnan came again on the morrow and the day after that, and each day milady gave him a more gracious welcome.

Every evening, either in the ante-chamber, the corridor, or on the stairs, he met the pretty maid. But, as we have said, D'Artagnan paid no attention to poor Kitty's persistence.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SOLICITOR'S DINNER.

MEANTIME the duel in which Porthos had played such a brilliant part had not made him forget the dinner of his *procureuse*.

On the morrow, about one o'clock, he received the last brushing from Mousqueton, and walked toward the Rue aux Ours, with the step of a man who was doubly in favor with fortune.

His heart beat, but not, like D'Artagnan's, with a young and impatient love. No, a more material interest stirred his blood. He was about at last to pass that mysterious threshold, to climb those unknown stairs by which, one by one, the old crowns of Master Coquenard had mounted.

He was about to see, in reality, a certain coffer, the image of which he had twenty times beheld in his dreams; a coffer long and deep, padlocked, barred, bolted to the floor; a coffer of which he had so often heard, and which the *procureuse's* hands, a little wrinkled, it is true, but still quite elegant, were about to open to his admiring looks.

And then he — a wanderer on the earth, a man without a fortune, a man without family, a soldier accustomed to inns, saloons, taverns, and hostelrys, a high liver forced to depend generally on chance invitations — was about to have an experience of family meals, to enjoy a comfortable establishment, and to accept those little attentions which, the tougher one is they more they please, as old veterans say.

To come as a cousin and take his place every day at a good table, to smooth out the wrinkles on the old solicitor's creased and yellow brow, to pluck the young clerks a little by teaching them "basset," "passe-dix," and "lansquenet," in their finest points, and by winning from them, by way of fee, for the lesson he would give them in an hour, their savings of a month, — all this was an enormously delightful outlook for Porthos.

The musketeer now and then remembered the ugly stories

then afloat, and indeed prevalent even at the present day, regarding solicitors — their meanness, stinginess, days of fasts; but as, after all, except for some few fits of economy, which Porthos had always considered very untimely, the *procureuse* had been tolerably liberal, — that is, of course, for a *procureuse*, — he hoped to find a house kept up in comfortable style.

However, at the very door the musketeer felt some doubts: the approach was not prepossessing; an ill-smelling, dark passage; a staircase ill lighted by bars through which stole a glimmer from a neighboring court; on the first floor a low door studded with enormous nails, like the principal door of the Grand Châtelet.

Porthos knocked with his knuckle; a tall, pale clerk, with a face shaded by a virgin forest of hair, opened the door, and bowed with the air of a man forced to respect in another the combination of lofty stature, indicating strength, the military dress, indicating rank, and a ruddy countenance, indicating the habit of living well.

Another shorter clerk behind the first, another taller clerk behind the second, an errand boy of twelve behind the third.

In all, three clerks and a half. This, for the time, argued a very extensive clientage.

Though the musketeer was not expected before one o'clock, the *procureuse* had been on the watch ever since twelve, reckoning that her lover's heart, and perhaps also his stomach, would bring him ahead of time.

Madame Coquenard therefore entered the office from the house almost at the instant that her guest entered from the stairs, and the worthy lady's appearance relieved him from great embarrassment. The clerks looked at him inquisitively, and he, not knowing exactly what to say to this ascending and descending scale, remained mute.

"It is my cousin!" cried the solicitor's wife; "come in! come in! Monsieur Porthos!"

The name of Porthos produced its effect upon the clerks, who began to laugh; but Porthos turned round, and every countenance quickly recovered its gravity.

They went into the solicitor's library, after passing through the ante-chamber in which the clerks were, and the office in which they ought to have been. This last apartment was a kind of dark room, stocked with old papers. As they passed from the office, they left the kitchen on the right and entered the drawing-room.

All these intercommunicating rooms did not inspire Porthos

with pleasant ideas. Conversation would be likely to be heard at a distance through all these open doors; then, as he passed by, he cast a rapid, investigating glance into the kitchen, and was obliged to acknowledge, to the shame of the *procureuse* and his own deep regret, that he did not see that fire, that animation, that bustle, which, just before a good dinner, generally prevail in that sanctuary of gluttony.

The solicitor had unquestionably been warned of his visit, for he betrayed no surprise at the sight of Porthos, who advanced toward him with a free and easy air, and saluted him courteously.

"We are cousins, it appears, Monsieur Porthos?" said the solicitor, rising in his cane chair by means of his arms.

The old man, enveloped in a large black doublet, which concealed the whole of his slender body, was well preserved and dry; his little gray eyes shone like carbuncles, and appeared, with his grimacing mouth, to be the only part of his face in which life survived. Unfortunately, his legs had begun to refuse their service to all this bony machine. During the five or six months that this weakness had been growing on him, the worthy solicitor had become almost the slave of his wife.

The cousin was accepted submissively, that was all. Master Coquenard on his legs would have declined all relationship with M. Porthos.

"Yes, monsieur, we are cousins," said Porthos, without being disconcerted; he had never reckoned on being received enthusiastically by the husband.

"On the female side, I believe?" said the solicitor, maliciously.

Porthos did not feel the satire of this, and took it for a piece of naïveté at which he laughed in his big moustache. Madame Coquenard, who knew that a naïve solicitor was a very rare variety in the species, smiled a little, and turned very red in the face.

Master Coquenard ever since Porthos's arrival had anxiously kept his eyes on a large chest placed in front of his oak desk. Porthos realized that this chest, though it did not correspond in shape with the one he had seen in his dreams, must be the blessed coffer, and congratulated himself that the reality was six feet higher than this dream.

Master Coquenard did not carry his genealogical investigations any further; but, withdrawing his anxious eyes from the chest, and fixing them on Porthos, he contented himself with saying:

"Our cousin will do us the favor of dining with us once before his departure for the campaign, will he not, Madame Coquenard?"

This time Porthos received the blow full in his stomach, and felt it. It appeared, likewise, that Madame Coquenard was not insensible to it, for she added:

"My cousin will not return if he finds that we ill treat him; but, on the other hand, he has too little time to pass in Paris, and consequently to see us, for us not to entreat him for every moment he can spare us before he goes."

"Oh, my legs! my poor legs! where are you?" murmured Coquenard.

And he endeavored to smile.

This aid, received by Porthos at the moment when he was attacked in his gastronomic hopes, inspired in him great gratitude toward his *procureuse*.

The hour of dinner soon arrived. They passed into the dining-room, a large dark apartment facing the kitchen.

The clerks, who, apparently, had smelt unusual perfumes in the house, displayed military punctuality, and stood with their stools in their hands, quite ready to sit down. Their jaws could be seen moving, in anticipation, with fearful threatenings.

"Ye gods!" thought Porthos, casting a glance at the three hungry clerks, for the errand boy, as you may easily imagine, was not admitted to the honors of the master's table, "ye gods! In my cousin's place, I would not keep such gluttons! They look like shipwrecked sailors who have had nothing to eat for six weeks."

Monsieur Coquenard entered, pushed along in his roller chair by Madame Coquenard. Porthos helped her in getting her husband up to the table.

He had scarcely got into the room when he began to move his nose and his jaws after the example of his clerks.

"Oh, ho!" said he; "here is a soup that is rather inviting!"

"What the devil can they smell so extraordinary in this soup?" said Porthos, at the sight of a pale, abundant, but perfectly clear bouillon, on the surface of which swam a few crusts, as widely scattered as the islands of an archipelago.

Madame Coquenard smiled, and on a sign from her every one eagerly sat down.

Master Coquenard was first served, then Porthos. Afterwards Madame Coquenard filled her own plate, and distributed the crusts without bouillon to the impatient clerks.

At this moment the dining-room door opened of itself with

a creak, and through the crack Porthos perceived the little clerk, who, not being allowed to partake of the feast, was eating his bread in the double odor of the kitchen and the dining-room.

After the soup the maid brought in a boiled fowl, a piece of magnificence which caused the eyes of all to open so wide that they seemed ready to burst.

"It is evident you love your family, Madame Coquenard," said the solicitor, with a smile that was almost tragic; "you are certainly treating your cousin very handsomely!"

The poor fowl was thin, and covered with one of those thick bristly skins which the bones cannot make their way through, in spite of all their efforts. They must have sought for the fowl a long time before finding it on the perch, to which it had retired to die of old age.

"The devil!" thought Porthos; "this is very painful! I respect old age, but I don't think much of it boiled or roasted."

And he looked round to see whether anybody shared his opinion; but, on the contrary, he saw nothing but eager eyes devouring, in anticipation, that sublime fowl, the object of his contempt.

Madame Coquenard drew the dish toward her, skilfully detached the two great black feet, which she placed on her husband's plate; cut off the neck, which, with the head, she put aside for herself; took off the wing for Porthos, and then returned the bird otherwise intact to the servant who had just brought it in, and thus it disappeared before the musketeer had time to examine the variations which disappointment produces on faces, according to the characters and temperaments of those who experience it.

In place of the fowl appeared a dish of beans, an enormous dish, where some mutton bones, which at first sight might be supposed to be accompanied by meat, pretended to show themselves.

But the clerks were not the dupes of this deceit, and their lugubrious looks spoke of settled resignation.

Madame Coquenard distributed this dish to the young men with a good housewife's moderation.

The time for the wine came. Master Coquenard poured, from a very small stone bottle, the third of a glass to each of the young men, served himself in about the same proportion, and passed the bottle to Porthos and Madame Coquenard.

The young men filled up their third of a glass with water; then, when they had drunk half the glass, they filled it up

again, and thus they kept doing. By the end of the repast, they were swallowing a drink which, from the color of a ruby, had passed to that of a pale topaz.

Porthos ate his wing of the fowl very timidly, and shuddered when he felt under the table the *procureuse's* knee coming in search of his. He also drank half a glass of this sparingly served wine, and found it to be nothing but that horrible raw vintage of Montreuil, the terror of all practised palates.

Master Coquenard saw him swallowing this wine undiluted, and sighed deeply.

"Will you eat any of these beans, cousin Porthos?" asked Madame Coquenard, in that tone which says, "Take my advice, don't touch them."

"Devil take me if I taste one of them!" murmured Porthos. Then aloud:

"No, thank you, my dear cousin, I am no longer hungry."

A general silence prevailed. Porthos knew not what to make of it. The solicitor repeated several times:

"Ah! Madame Coquenard! I give you my compliments. Your dinner has been a real feast. Lord! how well I have eaten!"

Master Coquenard had eaten his soup, the black feet of the fowl, and the only mutton bone on which there was the least appearance of meat.

Porthos fancied that he was being hoaxed, and began to twirl his moustache and scowl; but Madame Coquenard's knee came, and gently advised him to be patient.

The silence and the interruption in serving, though unintelligible to Porthos, had a terrible meaning for the clerks; on a look from the solicitor, accompanied by a smile from Madame Coquenard, they slowly arose from table, folded their napkins more slowly still, bowed and retired.

"Go, young men; go and promote digestion by working," said the solicitor gravely.

After the clerks had gone, Madame Coquenard rose and took from a sideboard a piece of cheese, some preserved quinces, and a cake which she herself had made of almonds and honey.

Master Coquenard frowned because there were too many good things; Porthos looked to see if the dish of beans was still on the table; the dish of beans had disappeared.

"A positive feast!" cried Master Coquenard, squirming in his chair; "a real feast, *epulæ epularum*. Lucullus dining at Lucullus's."

Porthos looked at the bottle, which was near him, and hoped that with wine, bread, and cheese he might make a dinner, but the wine was out, the bottle was empty; Monsieur and Madame Coquenard did not seem to notice it.

"This is fine!" said Porthos to himself; "I am neatly caught!"

He passed his tongue over a small spoonful of preserves, and stuck his teeth into Madame Coquenard's sticky pastry.

"Now," said he, "the sacrifice is consummated! Ah! if I had not the hope of having a peep with Madame Coquenard into her husband's strong-box!"

Master Coquenard, after the luxuries of such a repast, which he called an excess, felt the need of a siesta. Porthos began to hope that he would take it sitting where he was; but the solicitor would listen to nothing; he insisted on being taken to his chamber, and was not satisfied till he was close to his chest, on the edge of which, for still greater precaution, he placed his feet.

The *procureuse* took Porthos into an adjoining chamber, and they began to lay the foundations of their reconciliation.

"You may come and dine three times a week," said Madame Coquenard.

"No, thank you, madame!" said Porthos; "I don't like to take advantage; besides, I must think of my equipment."

"True," said the solicitor's wife, groaning; "that unfortunate equipment!"

"Alas! yes," said Porthos, "that's the trouble!"

"But what, pray, does the equipment of your corps consist of, Monsieur Porthos?"

"Oh! many things," said Porthos; "the musketeers, as you know, are picked soldiers, and they require a quantity of things that are useless to the guards or the Swiss."

"But mention them to me, one by one."

"Why, they may amount to—" said Porthos, who preferred discussing the total to taking them in detail.

The *procureuse* waited tremblingly.

"How much?" said she. "I hope it does not exceed—"

She stopped—speech failed her.

"Oh! no," said Porthos, "it does not exceed twenty-five hundred livres; I think that, with economy, I could manage it even with two thousand livres."

"Heavens! two thousand livres!" cried she; "why, that is a fortune!"

Porthos made a most significant grimace; Madame Coquenard understood it.

"I wished to know the details," said she, "because, as I have many relatives and much experience in business, I should be almost sure of getting things at a hundred per cent. less than you could get them yourself."

"Ah! ha!" said Porthos, "is that what you meant?"

"Yes, my dear Monsieur Porthos; thus, for instance, in the first place, don't you want a horse?"

"Yes, I want a horse."

"Well, then, I can just suit you."

"Ah!" said Porthos, brightening, "that's well as regards my horse; but I must have the trappings complete, and those are composed of things that only a musketeer can purchase. They wouldn't amount to more than three hundred livres, however."

"Three hundred livres; then put down three hundred livres," said the *procureuse*, with a sigh.

Porthos smiled; it may be remembered that he still had the saddle that came from Buckingham. These three hundred livres, then, he reckoned upon putting slyly into his pocket.

"Then," continued he, "there is my lackey's horse and my valise; I need not trouble you about my arms — I have them."

"A horse for your lackey?" resumed the solicitor's wife, hesitatingly; "you do things in a very noble style, my dear."

"Well, madame," said Porthos, haughtily, "do you take me for a peasant?"

"No, no; I only thought that a pretty mule made sometimes as good an appearance as a horse, and it seemed to me that by getting you a pretty mule for Mousqueton —"

"Well, agreed for a pretty mule," said Porthos; "you are right; I have seen very great Spanish nobles, whose whole suite were mounted on mules. But then you understand, Madame Coquenard, a mule with tassels and bells."

"Very well," said the solicitor's wife.

"Then there remains my valise."

"Oh! don't let that disturb you," cried Madame Coquenard; "my husband has five or six valises; you shall choose the best. There is one in particular, which he himself selects whenever he travels. It's large enough to hold everything."

"The valise is empty, I suppose?" asked Porthos naïvely.

"Certainly, it is empty," naïvely replied the *procureuse*.

"Ah! but the valise I want," cried Porthos, "is one well filled, my dear."

Madame Coquenard sighed again. Molière had not as yet written that famous scene in "L'Avare." Madame Coquenard therefore really anticipated Harpagon.

In short, the rest of the outfit was likewise debated in detail; and the result of the session was that Madame Coquenard agreed to give eight hundred livres in money, and to furnish the horse and mule that were to have the honor of carrying Porthos and Mousqueton to glory.

These conditions being settled, Porthos took leave of Madame Coquenard. The latter tried to detain him by casting tender glances at him, but Porthos urged the demands of duty, and the *procureuse* was obliged to give way to the king.

The musketeer returned home atrociously hungry and in very ill humor,

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MAID AND MISTRESS.

MEANTIME, in spite of the warnings of his conscience and the wise counsels of Athos, D'Artagnan hour by hour grew more and more deeply in love with milady. So the venturesome Gascon paid court to her every day, and he was convinced that sooner or later she could not fail to respond. One day when he arrived with his head in the air and as light at heart as a man who is expecting a shower of gold, he found the maid at the gateway of the hôtel. But this time the pretty Kitty was not satisfied with merely touching him as he passed; she took him gently by the hand.

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "she is charged with some message to me from her mistress. She is about to appoint a meeting which she probably has not the courage to speak of." And he looked down at the pretty girl with the most triumphant air imaginable.

"I should like to speak a few words with you, Chevalier," stammered the maid.

"Speak, my dear, speak," said D'Artagnan; "I am all attention."

"Here? That's impossible. What I have to say is too long, and, still more, too secret."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"If you will follow me?" said Kitty, timidly.

"Wherever you please."

"Come, then."

And Kitty, who had not let go D'Artagnan's hand, led him up a little dark, winding staircase, and, after ascending about fifteen steps, opened a door.

"Come in here, Chevalier," said she; "here we shall be alone, and can talk."

"And whose chamber is this, my pretty friend?"

"It is mine, Chevalier. It communicates with my mistress's by that door. But you need not fear; she will not hear what we say; she never goes to bed before midnight."

D'Artagnan glanced around him. The little apartment was charmingly tasteful and neat. But in spite of himself, his eyes were directed to the door which Kitty said led to milady's chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the young man's mind and sighed:

"You love my mistress, then, very dearly, Chevalier?" said she.

"Oh, more than I can say, Kitty! I am madly in love with her!"

Kitty sighed again.

"Alas, sir," said she, "that is a great pity!"

"What the devil do you see so pitiable in it?" said D'Artagnan.

"Because, sir," replied Kitty, "my mistress does not love you at all."

"Hah!" said D'Artagnan; "can she have charged you to tell me so?"

"Oh, no, sir; out of the regard I have for you, I have taken on myself to tell you so."

"I am much obliged, my dear Kitty, but for the intention only. For the information, you must agree, is not very pleasant."

"That is to say, you don't believe what I have told you, do you?"

"We always have some difficulty in believing such things, if only from self-love."

"Then you don't believe me?"

"Why, I confess that unless you give me some proof of what you advance —"

"What do you say to this?"

And Kitty drew a little note from her bosom.

"For me?" said D'Artagnan, snatching the letter from her

"No; for another."

"For another?"

“Yes.”

“His name! his name!” cried D’Artagnan.

“Read the address.”

“The Comte de Wardes.”

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon. As quick as thought he tore open the letter, in spite of the cry which Kitty uttered on seeing what he was going to do, or, rather, what he was doing.

“Oh, good Lord! Chevalier,” said she, “what are you doing?”

“I?” said D’Artagnan; “nothing;” and he read:

“You have not answered my first note. Are you indisposed, or have you forgot the glances you gave me at Madame de Guise’s ball? You have an opportunity now, Count; do not allow it to escape.”

D’Artagnan became very pale.

“Poor, dear Monsieur D’Artagnan!” said Kitty, in a voice full of compassion, and pressing the young man’s hand again.

“You pity me, my kind little creature?” said D’Artagnan.

“That I do, and with all my heart; for I know what it is to be in love.”

“You know what it is to be in love?” said D’Artagnan, looking at her for the first time with some attention.

“Alas! yes.”

“Well, then, instead of pitying me you would do much better to assist me in wreaking my revenge on your mistress.”

“And what sort of revenge would you take?”

“I would triumph over her, and supplant my rival.”

“I will never help you in that, Chevalier,” said Kitty, warmly.

“Why not?”

“For two reasons.”

“What are they?”

“The first is, that my mistress will never love you.”

“How do you know that?”

“You have offended her to the very heart.”

“I? — in what can I have offended her? I, who, ever since I have known her, have lived at her feet like a slave! Speak I beg of you!”

“I would never confess that except to the man — who should read to the bottom of my soul!”

D’Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. The

young girl possessed a freshness and beauty which many duchesses would have purchased with their coronets.

"Kitty," said he, "I will read to the bottom of your soul whenever you like. Don't let that disturb you."

And he gave her a kiss, at which the poor girl became as red as a cherry.

"Oh, no," cried Kitty, "you love me not—you love my mistress; you told me so only just now."

"And does that hinder you from telling me the second reason?"

"The second reason, Chevalier," replied Kitty, emboldened by the kiss in the first place, and still further by the expression in the young man's eyes, "is—that, in love, every one for herself!"

Then only D'Artagnan remembered Kitty's languishing glances and stifled sigh; how she constantly met him in the ante-chamber, in the corridor, or on the stairs; how she touched him with her hand every time she met him, but, absorbed by his desire to please the great lady, he had disdained the maid. He who hunts the eagle heeds not the sparrow.

But this time our Gascon saw at a glance all the advantage that he might derive from the love which Kitty had just confessed so naïvely—or so boldly: the interception of letters addressed to the Comte de Wardes, bits of secret information, entrance at all hours into Kitty's chamber, which was near her mistress's. The perfidious fellow, as may be seen, was already sacrificing in idea the poor girl to obtain milady willingly or by force.

"Well, my dear Kitty," said he to the young girl, "do you want me to give you a proof of that love of which you doubt?"

"What love?" asked the girl.

"Of that which I am ready to feel for you."

"And what proof is that?"

"Do you want me to spend with you this evening the time I generally spend with your mistress?"

"Oh, yes!" said Kitty, clapping her hands, "indeed I do."

"Well, then, my dear girl," said D'Artagnan, establishing himself in an arm-chair, "come here and let me tell you that you are the prettiest maid I ever saw."

And he told her so much, and so well, that the poor girl, who asked nothing better than to believe him, believed him. Nevertheless, to D'Artagnan's great astonishment, the pretty Kitty defended herself with considerable resolution.

Time passes very rapidly in attacks and repulses.

Twelve o'clock struck, and almost at the same time the bell was rung in milady's chamber.

"Great heavens!" cried Kitty, "there is my mistress calling me! Go, go quick!"

D'Artagnan rose, took his hat as if it had been his intention to obey; then quickly opening the door of a large wardrobe, instead of the door of the staircase, he crouched down in the midst of milady's robes and dressing-gowns.

"What are you doing?" cried Kitty.

D'Artagnan, who had secured the key, locked himself into the wardrobe without replying.

"Well," cried milady, in a sharp voice, "are you asleep, that you don't answer when I ring?"

And D'Artagnan heard the communicating door opened violently.

"Here I am, milady! here I am!" cried Kitty, springing forward to meet her mistress.

Both went into the bedroom, and, as the door remained open, D'Artagnan could hear milady for some time scolding her maid. Then at last she grew cooler, and the conversation turned upon him while Kitty was assisting her mistress to undress.

"Well," said milady, "I have not seen our Gascon this evening."

"What, milady! has he not been here?" said Kitty. "Could he be inconstant before having been made happy?"

"Oh, no; he must have been prevented by M. de Tréville or M. des Essarts. I understand my game, Kitty. I have him safe!"

"What are you going to do with him, madame?"

"Do with him? Oh, Kitty, there is something between that man and me that he is quite ignorant of. He very nearly made me lose my credit with his Eminence. . . . Oh, I will be revenged for that!"

"I thought you loved him?"

"Love him? I detest him! A fool, who held Lord Winter's life in his hands and did not kill him, so that I missed three hundred thousand livres a year!"

"That's true," said Kitty; "your son was his uncle's only heir, and until his coming of age you would have had the enjoyment of his fortune."

D'Artagnan shuddered to his very marrow at hearing this gentle creature reproach him in that sharp voice, which she

took such pains to conceal in conversation, for not having killed a man whom he had seen load her with kindnesses.

"Therefore," continued milady, "I should long ago have had my revenge on him, if the cardinal, I don't know why, had not requested me to treat him kindly."

"Oh, yes; but you have not treated very kindly the little woman he was so fond of?"

"What! the mercer's wife of the Rue des Fossoyeurs? Has he not already forgotten she ever existed? Fine vengeance that, 'pon my word!"

A cold sweat broke from D'Artagnan's brow. This woman was a monster!

He resumed his listening, but unfortunately the toilet was completed.

"That will do," said milady; "go into your own room, and to-morrow try again to get for me an answer to the letter I gave you."

"For M. de Wardes?" said Kitty.

"To be sure; for M. de Wardes."

"He is a man," said Kitty, "who appears to be quite different from that poor M. D'Artagnan."

"Go to bed, miss," said milady; "I don't like comments."

D'Artagnan heard the door close, then the noise of two bolts by which milady fastened herself in. Kitty on her side, as softly as possible, turned the key of the lock, and then D'Artagnan opened the closet door.

"Oh, heavens!" said Kitty, in a low voice, "what is the matter with you? How pale you are!"

"The abominable creature!" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Silence, silence! do go!" said Kitty; "there is nothing but a thin partition between my chamber and milady's; every word spoken in one can be heard in the other."

"That's just the reason I won't go," said D'Artagnan.

"What!" said Kitty, blushing.

"Or, at least, I will go — later."

And he drew Kitty to him. There was no way to resist. Resistance makes so much noise. Therefore Kitty yielded. This was an impulse of vengeance on milady. D'Artagnan realized the truth of the saying that vengeance is the delight of the gods. Therefore, with a little natural affection, he might have been satisfied with this new conquest; but D'Artagnan knew only ambition and pride.

However, it must be said to his praise that the first use he made of his influence over Kitty was to try to learn from her

what had become of Madame Bonacieux ; but the poor girl swore on the crucifix to D'Artagnan that she was entirely ignorant in regard to that, her mistress never letting her know half her secrets. Only she believed she could say she was not dead.

Kitty knew no more about the cause which had almost made milady lose the cardinal's confidence ; but this time D'Artagnan was better informed than she was : as he had seen milady on board an embargoed vessel at the moment he was leaving England, he had no doubt that it was on account of the studs.

But what was clearest in all this was, that milady's true hatred, her deep hatred, her inveterate hatred, arose from his not having killed her brother-in-law.

D'Artagnan came the next day to milady's. As she was in a very ill-humor, he suspected that the lack of an answer from M. de Wardes provoked her to be so. Kitty came in, but milady was very cross with her. She glanced at D'Artagnan, as much as to say — "See how I suffer on your account!"

Toward the end of the evening, however, the beautiful lioness became milder ; she smilingly listened to D'Artagnan's soft speeches ; she even gave him her hand to kiss.

When D'Artagnan took his departure, he scarcely knew what to think ; but as he was a youth not easily carried away by his emotions, even while he was continuing to pay court to milady he framed a little plan.

He found Kitty at the gate, and, as on the evening before, went up to her chamber. Kitty had been severely scolded ; she was charged with negligence. Milady could not at all understand the Comte de Wardes's silence, and she ordered Kitty to come at nine o'clock in the morning to take a third letter to him.

D'Artagnan made Kitty promise to bring him that letter on the following morning ; the poor girl promised all her lover desired ; she was madly in love.

Everything occurred as it had the night before : D'Artagnan concealed himself in his wardrobe, milady called, undressed, sent Kitty away, and shut the door. As before, D'Artagnan returned home at five o'clock in the morning.

At eleven o'clock he saw Kitty coming ; she held in her hand a fresh note from milady. This time the poor girl did not even hesitate at giving up the note to D'Artagnan. She let him do as he pleased. She belonged, body and soul, to her handsome soldier.

D'Artagnan opened the letter, and read as follows :

"This is the third time I have written to you, to tell you that I love you. Beware lest I write to you a fourth time, to tell you that I detest you.

"If you repent of the manner in which you have treated me, the young girl who brings you this note will tell you how a gentleman may obtain his pardon."

D'Artagnan colored and grew pale several times as he read this note.

"Oh! you love her still," said Kitty, who had not for an instant taken her eyes off the young man's face.

"No, Kitty, you are mistaken, I do not love her; but I wish to revenge myself for her contempt of me."

"Oh! yes, I know your vengeance! You told me!"

"What difference does it make to you, Kitty. You know I love only you."

"How can I be sure of that?"

"By the contempt I will cast on her."

D'Artagnan took a pen and wrote:

"MADAME: Until the present moment, I could not believe that your two first letters were addressed to me, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honor; besides, I was so seriously indisposed that I should, in any case, have hesitated to reply to them.

"But now I must believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter, but your servant, assure me that I have the good fortune to be loved by you.

"She has no occasion to teach me the way in which a gentleman may obtain his pardon. I will come and ask mine at eleven o'clock this evening.

"To delay it a single day would be, in my eyes, now, to commit a fresh offence.

"He whom you have rendered the happiest of men,

"COMTE DE WARDES."

This note was in the first place a forgery; it was likewise an indelicate thing to do. It was even, according to our present morals, something like an infamous action; but at that period, people were not so scrupulous. Besides, D'Artagnan, from her own admission, knew milady to be treacherous in matters of more importance, and he felt no great respect for her.

D'Artagnan's plan was very simple. By Kitty's chamber he could gain her mistress's. He would take advantage of the first moment of surprise, shame, and terror to triumph over her. He might fail, but something must be left to chance.

The campaign was to open in a week, and he would be compelled to leave Paris. D'Artagnan had no time for a prolonged love-making.

"There!" said the young man, handing Kitty the letter sealed and addressed; "give this note to milady: it is the Comte de Wardes's reply."

Poor Kitty turned deathly pale: she suspected what the letter contained.

"Listen, my dear girl!" said D'Artagnan; "you understand that all this must end in one way or another. Milady may discover that you gave the first note to my lackey instead of the count's, that I opened the others which should have been opened by M. de Wardes. Milady will then turn you off, and you know she is not a woman to let her vengeance stop there."

"Alas!" cried Kitty, "for whom have I exposed myself to all this?"

"For me, as I well know, my sweet girl," said D'Artagnan. "But I swear to you I am very grateful."

"But what does your note say?"

"Milady will tell you."

"Ah! you do not love me," cried Kitty, "and I am very wretched."

To such a reproach there is one answer that always deceives women. D'Artagnan replied in a way that left Kitty entirely convinced. Yet she wept a great deal before she could make up her mind to give the letter to milady. But at last she decided to do so, and that was all that D'Artagnan wanted.

Besides, he promised her that he would leave her mistress early that evening and on coming out of the parlor would go up to Kitty's room. This promise completely consoled poor Kitty.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHICH TREATS OF THE OUTFIT OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS.

SINCE the four friends had each been outfit-hunting, they had had no regular meeting. They dined separately wherever they happened to be, or rather wherever they might find a dinner. Military duty likewise claimed its share of the precious time that was gliding away so swiftly.

They had agreed, however, to meet once a week about one o'clock at Athos's, since he, in conformity with his vow, no longer crossed his threshold.

The day that Kitty went to see D'Artagnan was the day for their reunion.

Kitty had barely left him before D'Artagnan directed his steps toward the Rue Férou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing: Aramis was manifesting a decided inclination to resume the cassock. Athos, according to his principles, neither encouraged nor dissuaded him. Athos was for leaving every man to his own free will. He never proffered advice, and those who asked him had to ask him twice.

"People, as a rule," he said, "ask advice only in order to disregard it, and if they follow it, it is only for the sake of having some one to blame for having given it."

Porthos arrived a minute after D'Artagnan. Thus the four friends were all assembled.

Their four faces expressed four different feelings: Porthos's tranquillity; D'Artagnan's hope; Aramis's anxiety; and Athos's carelessness.

After a moment's conversation, in which Porthos hinted that a lady of high rank had condescended to relieve him from his embarrassment, Mousqueton entered.

He came to request his master to come home instantly. where, he said, with a very pitiful air, his presence was urgently required.

"Is it my equipment?"

"Yes, and no," replied Mousqueton.

"Well, but can't you say?"

"Come, monsieur!"

Porthos rose, saluted his friends, and followed Mousqueton. An instant after, Bazin made his appearance at the door.

"What do you want of me, my friend?" said Aramis, with that mildness of language which was observable in him every time that his ideas led toward the church.

"A man is waiting for you at home," replied Bazin.

"A man! What man?"

"A mendicant."

"Give him alms, Bazin, and bid him pray for a poor sinner."

"But this mendicant insists on speaking to you, and pretends that you will be very glad to see him."

"Has he sent no special message for me?"

"Yes! 'If M. Aramis hesitates to come,' he said, 'tell him I am from Tours.'"

"From Tours!" cried Aramis; "a thousand pardons

gentlemen, but no doubt this man brings me the news I expected."

And instantly arising, he went off at a quick pace.

Athos and D'Artagnan only remained.

"I believe those fellows have got what they were after. What do you think, D'Artagnan?" said Athos.

"I know that Porthos was in a fair way," replied D'Artagnan; "and as for Aramis, to tell the truth, I have never been seriously uneasy on his account. But you, my dear Athos, you, who so generously distributed the Englishman's pistoles, which were yours legitimately, what are you going to do?"

"I am satisfied with having killed that knave, seeing that it is holy bread to kill an Englishman. But if I had pocketed his pistoles, they would have weighed me down like remorse."

"Come, my dear Athos! you have truly extraordinary ideas!"

"Well, let that pass, let that pass! What did M. de Tréville mean when he did me the honor to call upon me yesterday, by saying that you associate with those suspicious English whom the cardinal protects?"

"That is to say, I visit an Englishwoman; the one I have told you about."

"Oh! yes! the fair woman, in regard to whom I gave you advice, which, naturally, you took care not to adopt."

"I gave you my reasons."

"Yes; you see your equipment in it, I think you said."

"Not at all! I am certain that that woman was concerned in Madame Bonacieux's abduction."

"Yes, and I understand; to find one woman you make love to another. It is the longest road, but certainly the most amusing."

D'Artagnan was on the point of telling Athos all, but one consideration restrained him. Athos was a gentleman punctilious in all points of honor, and there were in all the little plans which our lover had devised with regard to milady certain things that he was sure would not obtain his approbation. He, therefore, preferred to keep silent, and, as Athos was the least inquisitive man on earth, D'Artagnan's confidences stopped there.

We will therefore leave the two friends, who had nothing very important to say to each other, and follow Aramis.

On the news that the person who wanted to speak to him came from Tours, we saw with what rapidity the young man followed, or rather hastened ahead of, Bazin: he ran without stopping from the Rue Férou to the Rue de Vaugirard.

On entering, he found a man of short stature and intelligent eyes, but covered with rags.

"Did you ask for me?" said the musketeer.

"I wish to speak with Monsieur Aramis: is that your name, sir?"

"Yes! You have brought me something?"

"Yes, if you can show me a certain embroidered handkerchief?"

"Here it is," said Aramis, taking a key from his breast, and opening a little ebony box inlaid with mother-of-pearl; "here it is — look!"

"That is right," replied the mendicant; "dismiss your lackey."

In fact, Bazin, curious to know what the mendicant could want with his master, had kept pace with him, and arrived almost at the same time he did. But his quickness was not of much use to him; at the mendicant's hint, his master made him a sign to retire, and he had to obey.

Bazin being gone, the mendicant cast a rapid glance around him, in order to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and opening his ragged jacket, badly held together by a leather strap, he began to rip the upper part of his doublet, and drew a letter from it.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, kissed the superscription, and with almost religious respect opened the letter, which contained the following:

"LOVE: Fate wills that we should be still for some time separated; but the delightful days of youth are not lost beyond return. Perform your duty in camp; I will do mine elsewhere. Accept what the bearer brings you; take part in the campaign like a true gentleman. and think of me, who tenderly kiss your black eyes!

"Adieu! or, rather, *au revoir!*"

The mendicant kept ripping. He drew one by one from out his rags a hundred and fifty Spanish double pistoles, and laid them down on the table. Then he opened the door, bowed, and went out before the young man, stupefied, had a chance to address a word to him.

Aramis then re-read the letter, and perceived there was a postscript.

"P.S. — You may welcome the bearer, who is a count and a grandee of Spain."

"Golden dreams!" cried Aramis. "Oh, beautiful life! Yes, we are young! yes, we shall yet have happy days! Oh, my love, my blood, my life! All, all, my adored mistress!"

And he passionately kissed the letter, without even looking at the gold sparkling on the table.

Bazin scratched at the door, and as Aramis had no longer any reason to exclude him, he bade him come in.

Bazin was dazed at the sight of the gold, and forgot that he was coming to announce D'Artagnan, who, curious to know who the mendicant was, came to Aramis's residence on leaving Athos's.

Now, as D'Artagnan used no ceremony with Aramis, when he saw that Bazin forgot to announce him he announced himself.

"The devil! my dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "if those are the prunes that are sent to you from Tours, you will make my compliments to the gardener who gathers them."

"You are mistaken, my dear," said Aramis, who was always discreet, "my bookseller has just sent me the price of that poem in one-syllable verse which I began yonder."

"Ah! indeed," said D'Artagnan; "well, my dear Aramis, your bookseller is generous, that's all I can say."

"How, sir?" cried Bazin; "a poem sell so dear as that! It is incredible! Oh, sir! you do everything you want; you may become equal to M. de Voiture and M. de Benserade. I like that. A poet is almost as good as an abbé. Ah, Monsieur Aramis, become a poet, I beg of you."

"Bazin, my friend," said Aramis, "I believe you are interfering with my conversation."

Bazin perceived he was wrong; he bowed and went out.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan with a smile, "you sell your productions at their weight in gold; you are very fortunate, my friend. But take care, or else you will lose that letter which is peeping out from your doublet, and which comes, no doubt, from your bookseller likewise."

Aramis pushed the letter in, and buttoned up his doublet.

"My dear D'Artagnan," said he, "if you please, we will rejoin our friends, and since I am rich we will to-day begin to dine together again, until you are rich in your turn."

"'Pon my word!" said D'Artagnan, with great pleasure. "It is long since we have had a good dinner together; and as I have a somewhat hazardous expedition for this evening, I shall not be sorry, I confess, to fortify myself with a few glasses of good old Burgundy."

"Agreed, as to the old Burgundy; I have no objection to

that," said Aramis, from whom the sight of the gold had removed, as by magic, his ideas of a pious retreat.

And having put two or three double pistoles into his pocket to answer the needs of the moment, he locked the others in the ebony box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, where he kept the famous handkerchief, which served him as a talisman.

They first went to find Athos, and he, faithful to his vow of not going out, took it on him to have the dinner served in his room. As he was perfectly acquainted with the details of gastronomy, D'Artagnan and Aramis had no objection to abandoning this important care to him.

They were on their way to Porthos's, when, at the corner of the Rue Bac, they met Mousqueton, who, with a pitiable air, was driving forward a mule and a horse.

D'Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise, which was not free from a mixture of joy.

"Ah! my yellow horse," cried he; "Aramis, look at that horse!"

"Oh, the frightful brute!" said Aramis.

"Well, my dear," replied D'Artagnan, "that is the very horse on which I came to Paris."

"What, do you know this horse?" asked Mousqueton.

"It is of an original color," said Aramis; "I never saw one with such a hide in my life."

"I believe you," replied D'Artagnan; "and that was how I got three crowns for him; it must have been for his hide, for surely the carcass is not worth eighteen livres. But how did this horse come into your hands, Mousqueton?"

"Oh," said the lackey, "don't speak of it, sir. It is a frightful trick played us by the husband of our duchess!"

"How is that, Mousqueton?"

"Why, we are looked upon with a very favorable eye by a lady of quality, the Duchess of —; but, excuse me! my master has commanded me to be discreet. She had forced us to accept, as a little keepsake, a magnificent Spanish jennet and an Andalusian mule, which were beautiful to look on. The husband heard of the affair; on their way he confiscated the two magnificent beasts which she was sending us, and substituted these horrible animals in their places."

"Which you are taking back to him, I suppose?" said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly so!" replied Mousqueton; "you may well believe that we cannot accept such steeds as these in exchange for those which had been promised to us."

"No, by Jove!—though I should have liked to have seen Porthos on my yellow horse. That would give me an idea of how I looked when I reached Paris. But don't let us hinder you, Mousqueton; go and perform your master's orders. Is he at home?"

"Yes, sir," said Mousqueton, "but very ugly! Go on!"

And he continued his way toward the Quai des Grands Augustins, while the two friends went to ring the bell of the unfortunate Porthos. He had seen them crossing the yard, and he refrained from answering. So they rang in vain.

In the meanwhile Mousqueton kept on his way, and crossing the Pont Neuf, still driving the two sorry animals before him, he reached the Rue aux Ours. Having arrived there, he fastened, according to his master's orders, both the horse and mule to the knocker of the solicitor's door; then, without bothering about their future fate, he returned to Porthos, and told him that his errand was done.

In a short time the two wretched beasts, not having eaten anything since morning, made such a noise, by lifting the knocker and letting it fall again, that the solicitor ordered his errand-boy to go and inquire in the neighborhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Madame Coquenard recognized her present, and could not at first comprehend why it was returned; but a visit from Porthos soon enlightened her. The anger which fired the eyes of the musketeer, in spite of his efforts to suppress it, terrified his sensitive mistress. In fact, Mousqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met D'Artagnan and Aramis, and that D'Artagnan had recognized in the yellow horse the Béarnais pony on which he had come to Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos went away after having appointed a meeting with the *procureuse* in the cloisters of St. Magloire. The solicitor, seeing he was going, invited him to dinner; an invitation which the musketeer refused with a majestic air.

Madame Coquenard repaired trembling to the cloisters of St. Magloire, for she anticipated the reproaches that awaited her there; but she was fascinated by Porthos's lofty airs.

All that a man wounded in his self love can let fall in the shape of imprecations and reproaches on a woman's head, Porthos let fall on the bowed head of his *procureuse*.

"Alas!" said she, "I did all for the best. One of our clients is a horse-dealer; he owes money to the office, and was backward in payment. I took the mule and the horse for what he owed us; he promised me two noble steeds."

"Well, madame," said Porthos, "if he owed you more than five crowns, your horse-dealer is a thief."

"There is no harm in trying to buy things cheap, Monsieur Porthos," said the solicitor's wife, seeking to excuse herself.

"No, madame, but they who so earnestly try to buy things cheap ought to allow others to seek more generous friends."

And Porthos, turning on his heel, took a step as though to retire.

"Monsieur Porthos! Monsieur Porthos!" cried the solicitor's wife, "I have done wrong—I confess it. I ought not to have driven a bargain when the point was to equip a cavalier like you."

Porthos, without reply, retreated another step.

The *procureuse* fancied she saw him in a brilliant cloud, all surrounded by duchesses and marchionesses, casting bags of money at his feet.

"Stop! in the name of heaven, Monsieur Porthos!" cried she; "stop and let us talk."

"Talking with you brings me misfortune," said Porthos.

"But, tell me, what do you ask?"

"Nothing, for that amounts to the same thing as if I asked you for something."

The solicitor's wife clung to Porthos's arm, and, in the violence of her grief, cried out:

"Monsieur Porthos, I am ignorant of all such matters. How should I know what a horse is? How should I know what trappings are?"

"You should have left it to me then, madame, for I do know what they are; but you were anxious to drive a sharp bargain, and consequently lend at usury."

"I have done wrong, Monsieur Porthos, but I will make reparation; on my word of honor, I will."

"And how?" asked the musketeer.

"Listen! This evening M. Coquenard is going to the Duc de Chaulnes's, who has sent for him. It is upon a consultation which will last two hours at least; come, we shall be alone, and can make up our accounts."

"Well and good! That's the talk, my dear!"

"You will pardon me, then?"

"We will see," said Porthos, majestically.

And they separated, both saying: "Till this evening."

"The devil!" thought Porthos, as he walked away; "it seems to me that I am at last getting nearer to Master Coquenard's strong-box."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT NIGHT ALL CATS ARE GRAY.

THE evening so impatiently awaited by Porthos and D'Artagnan at length arrived.

D'Artagnan, as usual, presented himself about nine o'clock at milady's house. He found her in a charming humor. Never had she received him so kindly. Our Gascon saw at the first glance that his note had been delivered and was doing its work.

Kitty entered, bringing some sherbet. Her mistress was very pleasant to her, and greeted her with her most gracious smile. But, alas! the poor girl was so sad that she did not even notice milady's kindness.

D'Artagnan looked at these two women, first at one, then at the other, and was forced to avow to himself that nature had made a mistake in their composition. To the great lady she had given a vile and venal soul: to the maid she had given the heart of a duchess.

At ten o'clock milady began to appear uneasy. D'Artagnan understood what it meant. She looked at the clock, got up, sat down again, and smiled at D'Artagnan as much as to say: "You are doubtless very likable, but you would be charming if you would go away."

D'Artagnan rose and took his hat; milady gave him her hand to kiss. The young man felt that she pressed his hand, and he understood that she did so, not out of coquetry, but from a feeling of gratitude at his departure.

"She loves him devilishly," murmured he. Then he went out.

This time Kitty was not waiting for him, either in the ante-room, or in the corridor, or under the gateway. D'Artagnan was obliged alone to find the staircase and the little chamber. Kitty was sitting down, her head hidden in her hands, and was weeping.

She heard D'Artagnan enter, but did not raise her head at all. The young man went up to her, took her hands; then she burst out into sobs.

As D'Artagnan had supposed, milady, on receiving the letter, had, in the delirium of her joy, told her maid everything. Then, as a reward for the manner in which she had this time done her errand, she had given Kitty a purse.

On returning to her room, Kitty had flung the purse into a corner, where it was lying wide open, disgorging three or four gold coins on the carpet.

The poor girl lifted her head at D'Artagnan's caresses. He was terrified at the change in her countenance. She clasped her hands supplicatingly, but without venturing to speak a word.

Though D'Artagnan's heart was not at all sensitive, he was softened by such mute grief. But he held too tenaciously to his plans, and especially to this particular one, to change in any way the line of action he had marked out. He therefore allowed Kitty no hope that he would yield, but he represented to her his conduct as actuated by vengeance pure and simple.

This vengeance, moreover, became all the easier because milady, doubtless to hide her blushes from her lover, had ordered all the lights put out even in her own room, and M. de Wardes was to depart before daybreak, in the darkness.

Almost immediately they heard milady enter her chamber. D'Artagnan instantly glided into the wardrobe. Scarcely was he hidden there when the mistress's bell rang. Kitty replied to the summons, taking care to shut the door after her. But the partition was so thin that almost all that was said by the two women could be heard.

Milady appeared intoxicated with joy. She made Kitty repeat the minutest details of her pretended interview with De Wardes; how he had received the letter, how he had answered, what was the expression of his face, whether he appeared much in love — to all of which poor Kitty, obliged to keep up a brave countenance, answered in a stifled voice, the sad accents of which her mistress did not even notice, so selfish is happiness.

At last, as the time for the interview with the count drew near, milady had all the lights in her chamber extinguished, and dismissed Kitty with an injunction to introduce De Wardes the moment he arrived.

Kitty was not kept waiting long. Scarcely had D'Artagnan seen, by the keyhole of the wardrobe, that the whole apartment was in darkness, when he sprang from his hiding-place, just as Kitty was closing the door.

"What is that noise?" asked milady.

"My God! my God!" murmured Kitty. "He could not wait even for the hour he had himself appointed."

"It is I, the Comte de Wardes," replied D'Artagnan in a whisper.

"Well," said milady in a trembling voice, "why does he not

come in ? Count ! count ! ” added she, “ you well know I am waiting for you.”

At this appeal D’Artagnan pushed Kitty gently aside and darted into the chamber.

If a soul is ever tortured by rage and grief, it is when a lover receives, under a name not his own, the protestations of love intended for his fortunate rival.

D’Artagnan was in a painful situation which he had not foreseen. Jealousy gnawed at his heart, and he suffered almost as much as poor Kitty, who, at that very moment, was weeping in the next room.

“ Yes, count,” said milady, in her sweetest voice, and pressing his hand tenderly in hers ; “ yes, I am happy in the love which your looks and words have expressed to me each time we have met. I love you also. To-morrow, to-morrow, I wish some pledge from you to prove to me that you think of me. And lest you forget me, take this ! ”

She took a ring from her finger and put it on D’Artagnan’s.

D’Artagnan remembered seeing that ring on milady’s hand. It was a magnificent sapphire encircled by brilliants.

His first impulse was to give it back to her, but milady added :

“ No, no, keep this ring for love of me. Besides, you do me a service in accepting it,” she added with a voice full of emotion, “ a far greater service than you could imagine.”

“ This woman is full of mysteries,” murmured D’Artagnan to himself.

At that moment he felt ready to reveal everything. He opened his mouth to tell milady who he was and with what revengeful purpose he had come, when she added :

“ Poor dear angel ! whom that monster of a Gascon came so near killing.”

The monster was himself !

“ Do you suffer still from your wounds ? ” continued she.

“ Yes, a great deal,” said D’Artagnan, hardly knowing what to answer.

“ Be assured,” murmured she, “ I will avenge you, and cruelly.”

“ Damn it ! ” thought D’Artagnan. “ The time for a revelation has not yet come.”

D’Artagnan needed some time to recover from this short dialogue. But all the ideas of vengeance he had brought had vanished completely. This woman exercised over him an unaccountable fascination : he hated her and adored her at the

same moment. He had never believed that two sentiments so opposite could ever dwell in the same heart and by their union form a passion so strange and almost devilish.

But one o'clock had just struck, and they had to separate. D'Artagnan at the moment of leaving milady felt only a keen regret at departing, and in the passionate farewell they mutually bade each other, a new interview was agreed upon for the following week. Poor Kitty hoped she might say some words to D'Artagnan when he came into her room, but milady herself guided him through the darkness and left him only on the staircase.

The next morning D'Artagnan hastened to Athos's room. He had started on such a strange adventure that he wished to ask his advice. He told him everything. Athos frowned more than once. "Your milady," said he, "appears to me an infamous creature, but none the less you did wrong in deceiving her. Now you have, in one way or another, a terrible enemy on your hands."

While talking to him Athos was gazing earnestly at the sapphire surrounded with diamonds which had replaced on D'Artagnan's finger the queen's ring, now carefully kept in a jewel-case.

"You are looking at my ring?" said the Gascon, proud of showing off such a rich gift before his friend.

"Yes," said Athos, "it reminds me of a family jewel."

"It is beautiful, isn't it?" said D'Artagnan.

"Magnificent!" replied Athos; "I did not think there existed two sapphires of such fine water. Did you exchange it for your diamond?"

"No," said D'Artagnan, "it is a gift from my beautiful Englishwoman, or rather from my beautiful Frenchwoman, for, though I never have asked her, I am convinced she was born in France."

"This ring comes from milady!" cried Athos in a tone which revealed great emotion.

"From herself. She gave it to me last night."

"Show me your ring, I beg of you," said Athos.

"Here it is," replied D'Artagnan, drawing it from his finger.

Athos examined it and grew very pale. Then he tried it on the ring-finger of his left hand. It fitted his finger as if it had been made for it. A shadow of anger and vengeance passed over the nobleman's brow, usually so calm.

"It is impossible it can be she," said he. "How could that

ring be in milady Clarick's possession? And yet it is very difficult to find such an exact resemblance between two jewels."

"Do you know that ring?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I thought I did," said Athos, "but no doubt I was mistaken."

And he gave it back to D'Artagnan, without ceasing, however, to eye it.

"Come, D'Artagnan," said he after a moment, "take that ring off your finger, or turn the stone inside. It brings up to me such cruel memories that I could not keep cool enough to talk with you. Didn't you come to ask advice of me, didn't you tell me you were in doubt what to do? But stop! let me take that sapphire again. The one I mentioned had one of its faces scratched in consequence of an accident."

D'Artagnan took the ring again from his finger and gave it to Athos.

Athos shuddered. "Ha!" said he, "look, isn't it strange?" and he showed D'Artagnan the scratches he remembered should be there.

"But from whom did you get this sapphire, Athos?"

"From my mother. As I tell you, it is an old family jewel . . . which never was to leave the family."

"And you—sold it?" asked D'Artagnan hesitatingly.

"No," replied Athos with a singular smile; "I gave it away in a night of love, as it was given to you."

D'Artagnan became thoughtful in his turn. He seemed to see in milady's soul abysses the depths of which were full of darkness and mystery. He took back the ring, but put it in his pocket and not on his finger.

"D'Artagnan," said Athos, taking his hand, "you know I love you. If I had a son I could not love him more. Take my advice, renounce this woman. I do not know her, but a kind of intuition tells me she is wicked, and that there is something fatal about her."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan. "Therefore I have done with her. I confess this woman terrifies me."

"Will you have the courage?" said Athos.

"I shall," replied D'Artagnan; "and instantly."

"Truly, my young friend, you will act rightly," said the nobleman, pressing the Gascon's hand with an almost paternal affection; "and God grant that this woman, who has scarcely entered into your life, may not leave a terrible trace in it."

And Athos bowed to D'Artagnan like a man who wishes it

understood that he would not be sorry to be left alone with his thoughts.

On reaching home, D'Artagnan found Kitty waiting for him. A month of fever would not have changed the poor girl more than that night of sleeplessness and grief.

She was sent by her mistress to the false De Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love, intoxicated with joy. She wished to know when her lover would meet her again. And poor Kitty, pale and trembling, awaited D'Artagnan's reply.

Athos had a great influence over the young man. His friend's counsels, joined to the cries of his own heart, made him determine, now that his pride was saved and his vengeance satisfied, not to see milady again. As his reply he took a pen and wrote the following letter:

"Do not depend upon me, madame, for the next meeting. Since my convalescence I have so many affairs of this kind on my hands that I am compelled to take them in a certain order. When your turn comes, I shall have the honor to inform you of it. I kiss your hands.

"COMTE DE WARDES."

Not a word about the sapphire. The Gascon wished to reserve one weapon against milady; moreover, after what Athos had said, should it not go to him rather than to her?

D'Artagnan handed the open letter to Kitty, who at first was unable to comprehend it, but who became almost wild with joy on reading it a second time. She could scarcely believe her happiness. D'Artagnan was obliged to repeat to her orally the assurances which the letter gave her in writing, and whatever the danger might be which the poor girl incurred in giving this note to her mistress, considering milady's violent character, she nevertheless ran back to the Place Royale as fast as her feet could carry her.

The heart of the best of women is pitiless for the griefs of a rival.

Milady opened the letter with eagerness equal to Kitty's in bringing it. But at the first words she read she became livid. She crushed the paper in her hand, and turning with flashing eyes on Kitty:

"What is this letter!" cried she.

"The answer to yours, madame," replied Kitty, all in a tremble.

"Impossible!" cried milady. "It is impossible that a gentle-

man could have written such a letter to a woman." Then all at once starting up:

"My God!" cried she, "could he have —"

And she stopped.

She ground her teeth; she became ashen pale. She tried to take a step toward the window for air, but she could only stretch out her arms; her legs failed her and she sank into an arm-chair.

Kitty thought she was ill, and hastened to open her dress; but milady started up quickly:

"What do you want?" said she; "and why do you put your hand on me?"

"I thought you were faint, milady," answered the maid, terrified by the frightful expression that had come on her mistress's face.

"I faint! I! I! Do you take me for a weak, silly woman, then? When I am insulted I do not faint, I avenge myself! Do you understand?"

And she made a sign for Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DREAM OF VENGEANCE.

THAT evening milady gave orders that when M. D'Artagnan came as usual, he should be immediately admitted. But he did not come.

The next day Kitty went to see the young man again, and related to him all that had passed the evening before. D'Artagnan smiled. Milady's jealous anger was his revenge.

That evening milady was still more impatient than on the preceding one; she renewed the order relative to the Gascon; but, as before, she expected him in vain.

The next morning, when Kitty presented herself at D'Artagnan's, she was no longer joyous and alert, as she had been on the two preceding days, but, on the contrary, melancholy as death.

D'Artagnan asked the poor girl what was the matter; but her only reply was to draw a letter from her pocket, and give it to him.

This letter was in milady's handwriting, only this time it was addressed to D'Artagnan, and not to M. de Wardes.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"DEAR MONSIEUR D'ARTAGNAN: It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, particularly when you are about to leave

them for such a long time. My brother-in-law and myself expected you yesterday and the day before, but in vain. Will it be the same this evening?

“Your very grateful

“LADY CLARICK.”

“It’s very simple,” said D’Artagnan; “I was expecting this letter. My credit rises by the Comte de Wardes’s fall.”

“And will you go?” asked Kitty.

“Listen to me, my dear girl,” said the Gascon, who sought for an excuse in his own eyes for breaking the promise he had made Athos; “you must understand it would not be policy to accept such a positive invitation. Milady, seeing that I ceased coming, would not be able to understand the interruption of my visits, and might suspect something. Who could say how far such a woman’s vengeance would go?”

“Oh, heavens!” said Kitty, “you know how to represent things in such a way that you are always right. You are going now to pay your court to her again, and if, this time, you should succeed in pleasing her in your own name and with your own face, it would be much worse than before.”

Instinct caused poor Kitty to guess a part of what was going to happen. D’Artagnan reassured her as well as he could, and promised to remain insensible to milady’s seductions. He desired Kitty to tell her mistress that he was most grateful for her kindnesses, and that he would be obedient to her orders. But he dare not write, for fear of not being able to deceive such experienced eyes as milady’s sufficiently to disguise his writing.

As nine o’clock was striking, D’Artagnan was at the Place Royale. It was evident that the servants waiting in the ante-chamber had been instructed, for as soon as D’Artagnan appeared, even before he had asked if milady was at home, one of them ran to announce him.

“Show him in,” said milady curtly, but so piercingly that D’Artagnan heard her from the ante-chamber.

He was introduced.

“I am at home to nobody,” said milady; “mind, to nobody.” The lackey went out.

D’Artagnan looked curiously at milady. She was pale and her eyes looked red, either from tears or lack of sleep. The number of lights had been intentionally diminished, but the young woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had been consuming her during the last two days.

D'Artagnan approached her with his usual gallantry. She then made an extraordinary effort to receive him, but never did a face more distressed belie a more amiable smile.

To the questions which D'Artagnan put concerning her health —

"Bad!" replied she, "very bad!"

"Then," replied he, "my visit is ill-timed; no doubt you need to rest, and I will retire."

"No, no," said milady, "on the contrary, stay, Monsieur D'Artagnan — your agreeable company will divert me."

"Oh, ho!" thought D'Artagnan. "She has never been so kind before. I must be on my guard."

Milady assumed the most friendly air possible, and conversed with more than her usual brilliancy. At the same time the fever, which for an instant had left her, returned to give lustre to her eyes, color to her cheeks, and vermilion to her lips. D'Artagnan was again in the presence of the Circe who had before surrounded him with her enchantment. His love, which he believed to be extinct, but which was only asleep, awoke again in his heart. Milady smiled, and D'Artagnan felt that he could go to perdition for that smile.

There was a moment when he felt something like remorse.

By degrees milady became more communicative. She asked D'Artagnan if he had a mistress.

"Alas!" said D'Artagnan, with the most sentimental air he could assume, "can you be cruel enough to put such a question to me; to me, who, from the moment I saw you, have only breathed and sighed by reason of you and for you!"

Milady smiled with a strange smile.

"Then you do love me?" said she.

"Have I any need to tell you so? Have you not perceived it?"

"Yes; but, you know, the prouder hearts are, the more difficult they are to be won."

"Oh! difficulties do not frighten me," said D'Artagnan. "I shrink before nothing but impossibilities."

"Nothing is impossible," replied milady, "to true love."

"Nothing, madame?"

"Nothing," repeated milady.

"The devil!" thought D'Artagnan. "Her note is changed. Can this fair inconstant, perchance, be going to fall in love with me, and be disposed to give me another sapphire like the one she gave me when she took me for De Wardes?"

D'Artagnan impetuously drew his seat nearer to milady's.

"Well, now, let us see what you would do to prove this love of which you speak."

"All that could be required of me. Order — I am ready."

"For everything?"

"For everything," cried D'Artagnan, who knew beforehand that he had not much risk in engaging himself thus.

"Well, now, let us talk a little seriously," said milady, drawing her arm-chair nearer to D'Artagnan's chair.

"I am all attention, madame," said he.

Milady remained thoughtful and apparently undecided for a moment; then, as if appearing to have formed a resolution, —

"I have an enemy," said she.

"You, madame!" said D'Artagnan, affecting surprise; "is it possible? Heavens! good and beautiful as you are!"

"A mortal enemy."

"Really?"

"An enemy who has insulted me so cruelly that between him and me it is war to the death. May I count on you as my ally?"

D'Artagnan at once perceived what the vindictive creature was aiming at.

"You may, madame," said he, with emphasis. "My arm and my life are yours, as my love is."

"Then," said milady, "since you are as generous as you are loving —"

She paused.

"Well?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Well," replied milady, after a moment's silence, "from now on cease to talk of impossibilities."

"Do not overwhelm me with happiness!" cried D'Artagnan, throwing himself on his knees, and covering with kisses the hands which she let him keep.

"Avenge me of that infamous De Wardes," said milady to herself, "and I shall soon know how to get rid of you, double fool, animated sword-blade!"

"Fall voluntarily into my arms, after having made sport of me with such effrontery, hypocritical, dangerous woman," said D'Artagnan, likewise to himself, "and afterwards I will laugh at you with the man whom you wish me to kill."

D'Artagnan lifted up his head.

"I am ready," said he.

"You have understood me, then, dear Monsieur D'Artagnan," said milady.

"I could read one of your looks."

"Then you would use for me that arm of yours which has already acquired so much renown?"

"This instant!"

"But," said milady, "how shall I repay such a service? I know what lovers are: they are men who will not do anything for nothing."

"You know the only reply that I desire," said D'Artagnan, "the only one worthy of you and of me!"

And he drew her gently to him.

She scarcely resisted.

"Selfish man!" cried she, smiling.

"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan, really carried away by the passion this woman had the power to kindle in his heart. "ah! because my happiness appears so incredible to me, and because I am always afraid of seeing it fly away from me like a dream, I am anxious to make a reality of it."

"Well! deserve this pretended happiness, then!"

"I am at your disposal," said D'Artagnan.

"Quite certain?" said milady, with a last doubt.

"Only name to me the scoundrel who has brought tears into your beautiful eyes!"

"Who told you that I had been weeping?"

"It seemed to me—"

"Such women as I am don't weep," said milady.

"So much the better! Come, tell me what his name is?"

"Remember that his name is my whole secret."

"Yet I must know his name."

"Yes, you must; see what confidence I have in you!"

"You overwhelm me with joy. What is his name?"

"You know him."

"Indeed."

"Yes."

"It is surely not a friend of mine?" replied D'Artagnan, feigning hesitation, in order to make her believe in his ignorance.

"If he were a friend of yours, you would hesitate, then?" cried milady.

And a threatening glance darted from her eyes.

"Not if it were my own brother!" cried D'Artagnan, as if carried away by his enthusiasm.

Our Gascon ran no risk in this, for he knew what he was doing.

"I love your devotion," said milady.

"Alas! is that all you love in me?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I love you also, you!" said she, taking his hand.

And the warm pressure made D'Artagnan tremble, as if the fever consuming milady communicated itself to him by the touch.

"You love me! you!" cried he. "Oh! if that were so, I should lose my reason!"

And he folded her in his arms. She made no effort to avoid the kiss which he pressed upon her lips, only she did not return it.

Her lips were cold; it appeared to D'Artagnan that he had kissed a statue.

He was not the less intoxicated with joy, electrified by love; he almost believed in milady's tenderness; he almost believed in De Wardes's crime. If De Wardes had at that moment been at hand, he would have killed him.

Milady seized her opportunity.

"His name is —" said she, in her turn.

"De Wardes; I know," cried D'Artagnan.

"And how do you know?" asked milady, seizing both his hands, and trying to read with her eyes to the bottom of his heart.

D'Artagnan felt that he had gone too far, and that he had made a mistake.

"Tell me! tell me! tell me, I say," repeated milady; "how do you know?"

"How do I know?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"I know, because, yesterday, M. de Wardes, in a parlor where I was, displayed a ring which he said you gave him."

"Scoundrel!" cried milady.

The epithet, as may be easily understood, resounded to the very bottom of D'Artagnan's heart.

"Well?" continued she.

"Well, I will avenge you of this 'scoundrel,'" replied D'Artagnan, giving himself the airs of Don Japhet of Armenia.

"Thanks! my brave friend!" cried milady; "and when shall I be avenged?"

"To-morrow — immediately — when you please!"

Milady was about to cry out "immediately;" but she reflected that such precipitation would not be very gracious toward D'Artagnan.

Besides, she had a thousand precautions to take, a thousand counsels to give to her defender, in order that he might avoid

explanations with the count before witnesses. All this was answered by an expression of D'Artagnan's.

"To-morrow," said he, "you will be avenged, or I shall be dead!"

"No," said she, "you will avenge me; but you will not be dead. He is a coward."

Toward women he may be, but not toward men. I know something of him."

"But it seems you had no reason to complain of your fortune in your encounter with him?"

"Fortune is a courtesan; though favorable yesterday, she may turn her back to-morrow."

"Which means that now you hesitate?"

"No, I do not hesitate. God forbid! But would it be just to allow me to go to a possible death, without having given me at least something more than hope?"

Milady answered by a glance which said, "Is that all? — speak, then." And then, accompanying the glance with explanatory words, —

"That is only too just," said she, tenderly.

"Oh! you are an angel!" exclaimed the young man.

"Then all is agreed?" said she.

"Except what I ask of you, dear love!"

"But when I tell you that you may rely on my tenderness?"

"I have no to-morrow to wait for."

"Silence! I hear my brother; it will be better that he should not find you here."

She rang the bell; Kitty appeared.

"Go out this way," said she, opening a small private door, "and come back at eleven o'clock; we will then finish our conversation; Kitty will conduct you to my chamber."

The poor girl thought she should faint at hearing these words.

"Well, miss, what are you doing, standing there like a statue? Come; show the chevalier the way; and this evening at eleven o'clock — you understand!"

"It seems her appointments are all made for eleven o'clock," thought D'Artagnan; "that's a fixed habit."

Milady held out her hand to him, and he kissed it tenderly.

"There, now," said he, as he withdrew, scarcely heeding Kitty's reproaches; "there, I must not play the fool; this woman is certainly very bad; I must be on my guard."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MILADY'S SECRET.

D'ARTAGNAN left the hôtel instead of going up at once to Kitty's chamber, as she tried to persuade him to do, and for this he had two reasons: the first, because in this way he avoided reproaches, recriminations, and entreaties; the second, because he was not sorry to have an opportunity to read his own thoughts, and, if possible, to fathom this woman's.

The most palpable thing was that D'Artagnan loved milady like a madman, and that she did not love him the least in the world. For an instant D'Artagnan realized that the best thing for him to do would be to go home and write milady a long letter, in which he would confess to her that he and De Wardes were, up to the present moment, the same, and that consequently he could not undertake to kill De Wardes without committing suicide. But he also was spurred on by a ferocious desire of revenge; he wished to master this woman in his own name; and as such a revenge seemed to him to have a certain sweetness in it, he could not make up his mind to renounce it.

He walked six or seven times round the Place Royale, turning every ten steps to look at the light in milady's apartment, which was to be seen through the blinds. It was evident that this time the young woman was not in such haste to retire to her bedroom as she had been the first.

At length the light disappeared.

With this light was extinguished the last irresolution in D'Artagnan's heart. He recalled to his mind the details of the first night, and, with beating heart and brain on fire, he reëntered the hôtel and rushed up to Kitty's chamber.

The young girl, pale as death, and trembling in all her limbs, wished to delay her lover; but milady, listening intently, had heard the noise made by D'Artagnan, and, opening the door, —

"Come," said she.

All this showed such incredible lack of discretion, such monstrous audacity, that D'Artagnan could scarcely believe his eyes or his ears. He imagined himself drawn into one of these fantastic intrigues which we meet with in our dreams.

He, however, darted none the less quickly toward milady,

yielding to that magnetic attraction which the lodestone exercises over iron.

The door closed after them.

Kitty rushed toward it.

Jealousy, fury, offended pride, all the passions, in short, that wrangle for the heart of a woman in love, impelled her to make a revelation; but she was lost if she confessed having aided in such a plot, and, above all, D'Artagnan would also be lost to her forever. This thought of love counselled her to make this last sacrifice.

D'Artagnan, on his part, had gained the height of all his desires: a rival was no longer beloved in him; it was himself who was apparently beloved. To be sure, a secret voice at the bottom of his heart whispered to him that he was only an instrument of her revenge, that she would caress him only until he should inflict death. But pride, but self-love, but madness silenced this voice, stifled its whisper. And then our Gascon, with the amount of conceit we know he possessed, compared himself with De Wardes, and asked why, after all, he also should not be loved for his own qualities.

He there gave himself up to the sensations of the moment. Milady was no longer, for him, a woman of fatal designs who had for a moment terrified him. She was an ardent, passionate mistress, abandoning herself entirely to a love she really seemed to feel.

Some two hours thus glided away. But the transports of the two lovers moderated. Milady, not having the same motives that D'Artagnan had for forgetfulness, was the first to return to reality; she asked the young man if the measures destined to bring about a meeting between him and De Wardes the next day were already clear in his mind.

But D'Artagnan, whose ideas had taken quite another direction, forgot himself like a fool, and gallantly replied that it was rather late to think of duels and sword-thrusts.

This coldness toward the only thing that really occupied her thoughts alarmed milady, and her questions became more pressing.

Then D'Artagnan, who had never had any serious thought of such an impossible duel, tried to turn the conversation, but could not. Milady, with her irresistible spirit and iron will, kept him within the limits which she had predetermined.

D'Artagnan fancied that he was very clever in advising milady to pardon De Wardes and thus renounce the furious projects she had formed.

But at the first word he spoke, the young woman started, drew away, and, in a sharp bantering tone that sounded strangely in the darkness, exclaimed:

"Are you afraid, dear D'Artagnan?"

"You cannot think me so, dear love!" replied D'Artagnan; "but now suppose poor Comte de Wardes should prove to be less guilty than you imagine him to be."

"At all events," said milady seriously, "he has deceived me, and from the moment he deceived me he deserved death."

"He shall die then, since you condemn him," said D'Artagnan in such a firm tone that it seemed to milady the expression of a devotion superior to every trial.

She immediately came close to him again.

We cannot say how long the night seemed to milady, but D'Artagnan imagined he had been with her scarcely two hours when day began to appear at the window-blinds, and soon invaded the chamber with its pallid light.

Then milady, seeing that D'Artagnan was about to quit her, recalled to his mind for the last time the promise he had made to avenge her on the Comte de Wardes.

"I am quite ready," said D'Artagnan; "but in the first place, I should like to be certain of one thing."

"What?"

"Whether you love me?"

"I have proved to you that I do."

"Yes, and so I am yours body and soul; but if you love me as you say," continued he, "do you not feel a little fear on my account?"

"What have I to fear?"

"Why, that I may be dangerously wounded—even killed."

"Impossible!" cried milady; "you are such a valiant man, and such an expert swordsman."

"You would not, then, prefer a means," resumed D'Artagnan, "which would avenge you all the same, while rendering the combat useless?"

Milady looked at her lover in silence; the wan light of the first rays of day gave to her clear eyes a strangely baneful expression.

"Really," said she, "I believe you are now beginning to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate; but I really pity poor Comte de Wardes, since you have ceased to love him, and it seems to me that a man must be so severely punished merely by the loss of your love that he needs no other chastisement."

"Who told you that I ever loved him?" asked milady, sharply.

"At least, I am now at liberty to believe, without too much self-conceit, that you love some one else," said the young man, in a caressing tone, "and I repeat that I am really interested for the count."

"You are?" asked milady.

"Yes, I am."

"And why?"

"Because I alone know —"

"What?"

"That he is far from being, or rather from having been, so guilty toward you as he seems."

"Indeed!" said milady, with a look of some anxiety; "explain yourself, for I really cannot tell what you mean."

And she looked at D'Artagnan, who held her in his arms, while his eyes seemed gradually to turn into flames.

"Yes; I am a man of honor," said D'Artagnan, determined to end the matter, "and since your love is mine and I am sure I possess it — for I do possess it, do I not?"

"Absolutely and entirely; go on."

"Well, I feel as if transformed — a confession weighs on my mind."

"A confession!"

"If I had any doubt of your love I would not make it; but you love me, my beautiful mistress, do you not? You love me?"

"Certainly."

"Then if, through excess of love, I have rendered myself culpable toward you, you will pardon me?"

"Perhaps."

D'Artagnan tried, with the most winning smile he could put on, to touch milady's lips, but she avoided his kiss, but it had no effect; he had alarmed milady, and she involuntarily turned from him.

"Your confession," said she, growing paler; "what is this confession of yours?"

"You invited De Wardes on Thursday last to meet you here, in this very room, did you not?"

"I? No, certainly not!" said milady in a tone so firm and with a face so unconcerned that if D'Artagnan had not been so absolutely certain he would have doubted.

"Do not tell a lie, my angel!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, smiling, "it would do no good."

"What do you mean ? Speak — you frighten me to death !"

"Oh ! reassure yourself : you are not guilty toward me and I have already pardoned you."

"What more ? what more ?"

"De Wardes cannot boast of anything."

"How so ? You yourself told me that my ring —"

"My love, I have your ring. The Duc de Wardes of last Thursday and the D'Artagnan of to-night are one and the same person."

The imprudent young man expected to see surprise mixed with shame, a slight storm resolving itself into tears. But he was strangely mistaken, and his error was of brief duration.

Pale and terrible, milady started up, repulsed D'Artagnan with a violent blow on the chest, and leaped from the bed. It was then almost broad daylight.

D'Artagnan held her back by her night-dress, of fine India muslin, in order to implore her pardon, but by a powerful and determined effort she struggled to escape. Then the cambric gave way, leaving her neck bare, and on one of her beautiful, white, round shoulders D'Artagnan, with an indescribable shock, recognized the fleur-de-lis, that indelible stamp imprinted by the executioner's debasing hand.

"Great God !" cried D'Artagnan, loosing his hold of her night-robe ; and he remained on the bed, mute, motionless, and frozen.

But milady felt herself denounced by his very terror ; doubtless he had seen all ; the young man now knew her secret, her terrible secret, of which every one, except him, was ignorant.

She turned on him, no longer like a furious woman, but like a wounded panther.

"Ah, wretch," she cried, "you have basely betrayed me ! And what is worse, you know my secret. You shall die !"

And she flew to a little marquetry casket standing on the toilet-table, opened it with a feverish, trembling hand, took out of it a small gold-handled poniard with a sharp, slender blade, and then half-naked flung herself on D'Artagnan with one bound.

Though the young man was brave, as we have seen, he was terrified at her wild face, her horribly staring eyes, her pale cheeks, her bleeding lips. He crept over to the farther side of the bed as he would have done if a viper had been crawling toward him, and as his hand, covered with sweat, touched his sword, he drew it from the scabbard.

But without heeding the sword milady tried to climb on the

bed again so that she might stab him, nor did she desist till she felt the keen point at her throat.

She then tried to seize the blade with her hands. But D'Artagnan kept it free from her grasp, and while presenting the point, sometimes at her eyes, sometimes at her breast, he slid off the bed, designing to make his escape by the door leading to Kitty's apartment.

Milady meantime kept rushing at him with horrible fury, screaming in a blood-curdling manner.

As all this, however, was like a duel, D'Artagnan soon began to recover himself.

"Very well, pretty lady, very well," said he; "but, by the gods! if you don't calm yourself, I will mark you with a second fleur-de-lis on one of those pretty cheeks!"

"Scoundrel! scoundrel!" howled milady.

But D'Artagnan, while approaching the door, kept all the time on the defensive.

At the noise they made, she in overturning the furniture in her efforts to get at him, he in screening himself behind the furniture to keep out of her reach, Kitty opened the door. D'Artagnan, who had constantly manœuvred to gain this door, was not more than three paces from it. With one spring he flew from milady's chamber into the maid's, and, quick as lightning, shut the door, against which he leaned with all his weight, while Kitty bolted it.

Then milady, with a strength far above a woman's, attempted to tear down the door-posts which kept her in her room. Then, when she found she could not accomplish it, she kept stabbing at the door with her poniard, and more than once drove it through the thickness of the wood. Every blow was accompanied by a terrible imprecation.

"Quick, quick, Kitty!" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice, as soon as the bolts were fast; "let me get out of the hôtel; for if we leave her time to turn round, she will have me killed by the servants!"

"But you can't go out so," said Kitty; "you have hardly any clothes on."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan, then, for the first time, taking note of the costume in which he appeared, "that's true. But dress me as well as you are able, only make haste. Think, my dear girl, it's life and death!"

Kitty was but too well aware of that. In a moment she muffled him up in a flowered dress, a capacious hood, and a cloak. She gave him some slippers, which he put on his naked

feet, then she conducted him downstairs. It was time. Milady had already rung her bell, and roused the whole hôtel. The porter had just opened the street door as milady, only half-dressed, was shouting down from her window:

“Don’t open the door!”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOW, WITHOUT INCOMMODOING HIMSELF, ATHOS GOT HIS OUTFIT.

THE young man made his escape while she was still threatening him with an impotent gesture. At the moment she lost sight of him, milady sunk back fainting into her bedroom.

D’Artagnan was so completely upset that, without considering what would become of Kitty, he ran at full speed across half Paris, and did not stop till he reached Athos’s door. The confusion of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the cries of some of the patrol who started in pursuit of him, and the jeers of the passers-by, who, notwithstanding the early hour, were going to their work, only made him run the faster.

He crossed the court, ran up the two flights to Athos’s apartment, and knocked at the door hard enough to break it down.

Grimaud, his eyes swollen with sleep, came to open for him. D’Artagnan darted so violently into the room that he nearly knocked him over.

In spite of his habitual silence, the poor fellow this time found his tongue.

“Helloa, there!” cried he; “what do you want, you strumpet? What’s your business here, you hussy?”

D’Artagnan threw off his hood, and freed his hands from the folds of the cloak. At sight of his moustaches and naked sword, the poor devil perceived he had to deal with a man.

He then concluded it must be an assassin.

“Help! murder! help!” cried he.

“Hold your tongue, you villain!” said the young man; “I am D’Artagnan—don’t you know me? Where is your master?”

“You, Monsieur D’Artagnan!” cried Grimaud; “impossible!”

“Grimaud,” said Athos, coming out of his apartment in a

dressing-gown, "Grimaud, I believe you are permitting yourself to speak?"

"Ah, monsieur, but —"

"Silence!"

Grimaud contented himself with pointing at D'Artagnan.

Athos recognized his comrade, and, phlegmatic as he was, he burst into a laugh made quite excusable by the strange masquerade before his eyes: hood askew, petticoats falling over shoes, sleeves tucked up, and moustaches stiff with agitation.

"Don't laugh, my friend!" cried D'Artagnan; "for heaven's sake, don't laugh, for, on my soul, I tell you it's no laughing matter!"

And he pronounced these words with such a solemn air and with such genuine terror that Athos instantly seized his hand, crying:

"Are you wounded, my friend? How pale you are!"

"No, but I have just met with a terrible adventure! Are you alone, Athos?"

"Zounds! whom do you expect to find with me at this hour?"

"Well, well!"

And D'Artagnan rushed into Athos's chamber.

"Come, speak!" said the latter, closing the door and bolting it, that they might not be disturbed. "Is the king dead? Have you killed the cardinal? You are quite upset. Come, come, tell me; I am dying with anxiety!"

"Athos," said D'Artagnan, getting rid of his female garments and appearing in his shirt, "prepare to hear an incredible, an unheard-of history."

"Well, but take this dressing-gown first," said the musketeer to his friend.

D'Artagnan put on the dressing-gown, taking one sleeve for the other, so greatly was he still agitated.

"Well?" said Athos.

"Well," replied D'Artagnan, bending down to Athos's ear, and lowering his voice, "milady is marked with a fleur-de-lis on her shoulder!"

"Ah!" cried the musketeer, as if he had received a ball in his heart.

"Come now," said D'Artagnan, "are you sure that the *other* is dead?"

"*The other?*" said Athos, in such a stifled voice that D'Artagnan scarcely heard him.

"Yes; she of whom you told me one day at Amiens."

Athos uttered a groan and let his head sink into his hands.

"This one is a woman of from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age."

"Fair," said Athos, "is she not?"

"Very."

"Clear, blue eyes, of a strange brilliancy, with black eye-lashes and eyebrows?"

"Yes."

"Tall, well-made? She has lost a tooth, next to the eye-tooth on the left?"

"Yes."

"The fleur-de-lis is small, rose-colored, and somewhat faint from the coat of paste applied to it?"

"Yes."

"But you say she is an Englishwoman?"

"She is called milady, but she may be French. Lord Winter is only her brother-in-law."

"I will see her, D'Artagnan!"

"Beware, Athos, beware; you tried to kill her; she is a woman to return you the same, and not to fail."

"She will not dare to say anything, for it would be denouncing herself."

"She is capable of everything. Did you ever see her furious?"

"No," said Athos.

"A tigress! a panther! Ah! my dear Athos, I am greatly afraid I have drawn a terrible vengeance on both of us!"

D'Artagnan then told the whole story; milady's insane anger and her menaces of death.

"You are right, and, 'pon my soul, I would give my life for a hair," said Athos. "Fortunately, day after to-morrow we leave Paris. We are going, according to all probability, to Rochelle, and once gone—"

"She will follow you to the end of the world, Athos, if she recognizes you; so let her hate be wreaked on me alone!"

"My dear friend, of what consequence is it if she kills me?" said Athos; "do you think, perchance, I set any great store by life?"

"There is something horribly mysterious under all this, Athos; this woman is one of the cardinal's spies, I am certain."

"In that case, take care of yourself. If the cardinal does not hold you in high admiration for the London affair, he

entertains a great hatred for you; but as, considering everything, he cannot accuse you openly, and as hatred must be satisfied, particularly when it's a cardinal's hatred, take care of yourself! If you go out, do not go out alone. When you eat, use every precaution. In short, mistrust everything, even your own shadow."

"Fortunately," said D'Artagnan, "all this will be necessary only until after to-morrow evening, for when once with the army, I hope we shall have only men to dread."

"In the meantime," said Athos, "I renounce my plan of seclusion, and I will go wherever you go. You must return to the Rue des Fossoyeurs; I will accompany you."

"Yes; but near as it is, I cannot go there in this rig."

"That's true," said Athos.

And he rang the bell.

Grimaud entered.

Athos made him a sign to go to D'Artagnan's residence and bring back some clothes.

Grimaud replied by another sign, that he understood perfectly, and set off.

"Come, now, my dear friend, but this does not help toward your equipment," said Athos, "for, if I am not mistaken, you have left all your clothes at milady's, and she certainly will not have the politeness to return them to you. Fortunately, you have the sapphire."

"The sapphire is yours, my dear Athos! Did you not tell me it was a family ring?"

"Yes, my father gave two thousand crowns for it, as he once told me; it formed part of the wedding present he made my mother; and it is magnificent. My mother gave it to me, and I, madman that I was, instead of keeping the ring as a holy relic, gave it to that wretched woman."

"Then, my dear, take back your ring, to which, it is plain, you attach much value."

"I? Take back the ring after it has passed through that infamous creature's hands! Never! D'Artagnan, this ring is defiled."

"Sell it, then."

"Sell a jewel that came from my mother? I confess I should regard it as a sacrilege."

"Pawn it, then. You can raise at least a thousand crowns on it. With such a sum you will be master of the situation. Then when you get more money, you can redeem it and have

it back cleansed from its stains, for it will have passed through the usurer's hands."

Athos smiled.

"You are a capital comrade, my dear D'Artagnan," said he. "Your never-failing cheerfulness lifts up poor souls in affliction. Well, let us pawn the ring, but on one condition."

"What?"

"That five hundred crowns of it shall be yours and five hundred mine."

"Don't think of such a thing, Athos. I don't need the quarter of such a sum. I am in the guards; and if I sell my saddle, I shall get it. What do I lack? A horse for Planchet — that's all. Besides, you forget that I too have a ring."

"Yes, and you seem to attach more value to it than I do to mine; at least so it has seemed to me."

"Of course, for in any extremity it may help us out of some great difficulty or even danger. It is not only a precious diamond, but it is also an enchanted talisman."

"I don't know what you mean, but I have faith in what you say. Now as to my ring, or rather yours: you are to have half the sum advanced on it or I will throw it into the Seine; and I doubt whether any fish, as in the case of Polycrates, would be polite enough to bring it back."

"Well, then, I will take it," said D'Artagnan.

At this moment Grimaud came in accompanied by Planchet, who was anxious about his master and curious to know what had happened to him, and so had taken advantage of the opportunity and brought the clothes himself. D'Artagnan dressed, Athos did the same. Then when both were ready to go out, Athos imitated the action of a person taking aim, and Grimaud immediately took down his musketoon and got ready to follow his master.

They arrived without mishap at the Rue des Fossoyeurs. Bonacieux was at the door; he looked banteringly at D'Artagnan:

"Ah, my dear tenant," said he. "Hurry up, you have a very pretty girl waiting at your room; and you know women don't like to be kept waiting."

"It's Kitty," said D'Artagnan to himself, and darted into the passage.

In fact, there on the landing that led to his chamber he found the poor girl all of a tremble and crouching against the door.

As soon as she saw him :

"You promised me your protection ; you promised to save me from her anger," said she. "Remember, you are the one who ruined me !"

"Yes, certainly I did," said D'Artagnan. "Be at ease, Kitty. But what happened after I left ?"

"How can I tell !" said Kitty. "The lackeys came when they heard her cries. She was mad with anger. Every imaginable curse she poured forth against you. Then I thought she would remember that you went through my chamber into hers, and that then she would suppose I was your accomplice. So I took what little money I had, and the best of my things, and I ran away."

"Poor girl ! But what can I do with you ? I am going away day after to-morrow."

"Do what you please, chevalier. Help me out of Paris ; help me out of France !"

"I cannot take you, however, to the siege of Rochelle," said D'Artagnan.

"No ; but you can get me a place in the provinces with some lady of your acquaintance ; in your own country, for instance."

"Ah ! my dear love, in my country the ladies do without chambermaids. But stop ; I can manage it for you. Planchet, go and find M. Aramis. Have him come here immediately. We have something very important to say to him."

"I understand," said Athos ; "but why not Porthos ? I should have thought that his marchioness —"

"Oh ! Porthos's marchioness is dressed by her husband's clerks," said D'Artagnan, laughing. "Besides, Kitty would not like to live in the Rue aux Ours. Would you, Kitty ?"

"I am willing to live anywhere you please," said Kitty, "provided I am well concealed, and it is not known where I am."

"And now, Kitty, that we are about to separate, and, consequently, you are no longer jealous of me —"

"Chevalier, far off or near," said Kitty, "I shall always love you."

"Where the devil will constancy next take up its abode ?" whispered Athos.

"And I also," said D'Artagnan, "I also shall always love you. Be sure of that. But now, answer me. I attach great importance to the question I am going to ask you. Did you never hear a young woman spoken of who was carried off one night ?"

"There now! Oh, heavens! chevalier, do you love that woman still?"

"No; it is a friend of mine who loves her. Here, M. Athos; this gentleman here."

"I?" cried Athos, with an accent like that of a man who perceives he is about to tread on an adder.

"Certainly, you!" said D'Artagnan, pressing Athos's hand. "You know the interest we both take in this poor little Madame Bonacieux. Besides, Kitty will tell nothing, will you, Kitty? You understand, my dear girl," continued D'Artagnan, "she is the wife of that frightful booby you saw at the door as you came in."

"Oh! good heavens! you remind me of my fright! If he should have recognized me!"

"What! recognize you! Did you ever see that man before?"

"He came twice to milady's."

"That's it. About what time?"

"Why, about a fortnight or eighteen days ago."

"Exactly so."

"And yesterday evening he was there again."

"Yesterday evening?"

"Yes, just before you came."

"My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a network of spies! And do you believe he recognized you, Kitty?"

"I pulled down my hood as soon as I saw him, but perhaps it was too late."

"Go down, Athos,—he mistrusts you less than me,—and see whether he is still at his door."

Athos went down and returned immediately.

"He has gone," said he, "and the house door is shut."

"He has gone to make his report, and to say that all the pigeons are at this moment in the dovecote."

"Well, then, let us all fly away," said Athos, "and leave nobody here but Planchet to bring us news."

"Hold on a minute. How about Aramis, whom we have sent for?"

"That's true," said Athos, "we must wait for Aramis."

At that moment Aramis arrived.

The matter was explained to him, and he was told that he must find a place for Kitty with some of his high connections.

Aramis reflected for a minute, and then said, coloring:

"Will it be really rendering you a service, D'Artagnan?"

"I shall be grateful to you all my life."

"Very well; Madame de Bois-Tracy asked me, in behalf of a friend of hers who resides in the provinces, I believe, for a trustworthy chambermaid; and my dear D'Artagnan if you can answer for this young girl —"

"Oh! sir, be assured that I shall be entirely devoted to the person who will afford me the means of leaving Paris."

"Then," said Aramis, "this turns out all for the best."

He sat down at the table and wrote a little note, which he sealed with a ring and gave to Kitty.

"And now, my dear girl," said D'Artagnan, "you know that it is not well for any of us to be here. Therefore let us separate. We shall meet again in better days."

"And whenever and wherever we meet again," said Kitty, "you will find that I love you as devotedly as I love you to-day."

"A gambler's vow!" said Athos, while D'Artagnan went to conduct Kitty downstairs.

An instant afterwards the three young men separated, agreeing to meet again at four o'clock at Athos's residence, and leaving Planchet to guard the house.

Aramis returned home, and Athos and D'Artagnan went to see about pawning the sapphire.

As our Gascon had foreseen, they found no difficulty in obtaining three hundred pistoles on the ring. Still further, the Jew told them that he would give five hundred pistoles for it if they would sell it to him, as it would make a magnificent pendant for an ear-ring.

Athos and D'Artagnan, with the activity of two soldiers, and the knowledge of two connoisseurs, spent scarcely three hours in purchasing the musketeer's entire outfit. Besides, Athos was very easy to please, and a great noble to his fingers' ends. Whenever anything suited him, he paid the price asked, without any thought of dickering. D'Artagnan would have remonstrated at this, but Athos put his hand on his shoulder with a smile, and D'Artagnan understood that it was all very well for such a little Gascon gentleman as himself to drive a bargain, but not for a man who had the bearing of a prince.

The musketeer found a superb Andalusian horse, black as jet, nostrils of fire, legs clean and elegant, rising six years. He examined him, and found him sound and without blemish. A thousand livres was asked for him.

He might, perhaps, have been bought for less; but while D'Artagnan was discussing the price with the dealer, Athos was counting the hundred pistoles on the table.

Grimaud had a stout, short Picard cob, which cost three hundred livres.

But when the saddle and arms for Grimaud were purchased, Athos had not a sou left of his hundred and fifty pistoles. D'Artagnan offered his friend a part of his share, which he should return when convenient.

But Athos only replied to this proposal by shrugging his shoulders.

"How much did the Jew say he would give for the sapphire, if he purchased it?" said Athos.

"Five hundred pistoles."

"That is to say, two hundred more! A hundred pistoles for you, and a hundred pistoles for me. Well, now, that would be a real fortune to us, my friend; let us go back to the Jew's again."

"What! will you —"

"This ring would certainly only recall very bitter remembrances. Then we shall never be masters of three hundred pistoles to redeem it; so that we really should lose two hundred pistoles by the bargain. Go, tell him the ring is his, D'Artagnan, and come back with the two hundred pistoles."

"Reflect, Athos!"

"We need ready money just now, and we must learn how to make sacrifices. Go, D'Artagnan, go; Grimaud will accompany you with his musketoon."

Half an hour afterwards, D'Artagnan returned with the two thousand livres, and without having met with any accident.

Thus it was that Athos found at home resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A VISION.

At four o'clock the four friends were all assembled in Athos's apartments. Their anxiety about their outfits had all disappeared, and each face preserved now only the expression of its own secret anxieties; for behind all present happiness is concealed a fear for the future.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bringing two letters for D'Artagnan.

The one was a little note neatly folded, with a pretty seal in green wax, on which was impressed a dove bearing a green branch.

The other was a large square epistle, resplendent with the terrible arms of his Eminence the cardinal-duke.

At the sight of the little letter D'Artagnan's heart bounded, for he thought he recognized the writing; and though he had seen it but once, the memory of it remained at the bottom of his heart.

He therefore seized the little letter and opened it eagerly.

"On Thursday next, at seven o'clock in the evening," said the letter, "be on the road to Chaillot. Look carefully into the carriages that pass; but if you value your own life, or the life of those who love you, do not speak a word, do not make a motion which may lead any one to believe that you recognize her who exposes herself to everything for the sake of seeing you for an instant only."

No signature.

"That's a snare," said Athos; "don't go, D'Artagnan."

"And yet," replied D'Artagnan, "I think I recognize the writing."

"That may be forged," said Athos; "between six and seven o'clock the road to Chaillot is quite deserted; you might as well go and ride in the forest of Bondy."

"But suppose we all go," said D'Artagnan; "what the devil! they won't devour us all four; besides four lackeys, besides horses, besides arms."

"And, besides, it will be a good chance to show off our new equipments," said Porthos.

"But if it is a woman who writes," said Aramis, "and she desires not to be seen, remember you compromise her, D'Artagnan. That is not behaving like a gentleman."

"We will remain in the background, and he will advance alone."

"Yes, but a pistol-shot is easily fired from a carriage, however fast it may be going."

"Bah!" said D'Artagnan, "they will miss me; if they fire we will ride after the carriage, and exterminate those who may be in it. That will make so many enemies the less."

"He is right," said Porthos; "war! besides, we need to try our new arms."

"Bah! Let us enjoy that pleasure," said Aramis, in his mild and careless manner.

"As you please," said Athos.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "it is half-past four, and we have no more than time to be on the road to Chaillot by six."

"Besides, if we go out too late, nobody will see us," said

Porthos, "and that would be a pity. Come, gentlemen, let us get ready."

"But your second letter," said Athos, "you forget that; it appears to me, however, the seal shows it well deserves to be opened. For my part, I declare, D'Artagnan, I think it of much more consequence than the little piece of waste paper you have so slyly slipped into your bosom."

D'Artagnan grew red.

"Well," said the young man, "let us see, gentlemen, what his Eminence wants of me," and D'Artagnan unsealed the letter, and read:

"M. D'Artagnan, of the king's guards, company Des Es-sarts, is expected at the Palais-Cardinal this evening at eight o'clock.

"LA HOUDENIÈRE, Captain of the Guards."

"The devil!" said Athos; "here's a rendezvous much more serious than the other."

"I will go to the second after attending the first," said D'Artagnan; "one is for seven o'clock, and the other for eight; there will be time for both."

"Hum! Now, I would not go at all," said Aramis; "a gallant knight cannot decline an appointment made by a lady; but a prudent gentleman may excuse himself from not waiting on his Eminence, particularly when he has reason to believe he is not invited in order to receive compliments."

"I am of Aramis's opinion," said Porthos.

"Gentlemen," replied D'Artagnan, "I have already received through M. de Cavois a similar invitation from his Eminence; I neglected it, and on the morrow a serious misfortune happened to me!—Constance disappeared. Whatever may ensue, I shall go."

"If you are determined," said Athos, "do so."

"Yes, but the Bastille?" said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out," said D'Artagnan.

"To be sure we will," replied Aramis and Porthos, with admirable coolness, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, "to be sure we will get you out, if there; but in the meantime, as we are to set off the day after to-morrow, you would do much better not to risk the Bastille."

"Let us do better than that," said Athos; "do not let us leave him during the whole evening; let each of us wait at a gate of the palace with three musketeers behind him; if we see any carriage come out with closed windows, and of

suspicious appearance, let us fall on it; it is a long time since we have had a skirmish with the cardinal's guards. M. de Tréville must think we are dead."

"To a certainty, Athos," said Aramis, "you were meant to be a general; what do you think of the plan, gentlemen?"

"Admirable!" replied the young men in chorus.

"Well!" said Porthos, "I will run to the hôtel, and engage our comrades to hold themselves in readiness by eight o'clock; the rendezvous will be the Place du Palais-Cardinal; in the meantime, you have the lackeys saddle the horses."

"I have no horse," said D'Artagnan, "but I will take one of M. de Tréville's."

"That is not worth while," said Aramis, "you shall have one of mine."

"One of yours! How many have you, pray?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling.

"My dear!" cried Athos, "you are the best-mounted poet of France or Navarre."

"Listen, my dear Aramis: you don't want three horses, do you? I cannot comprehend why you bought three!"

"No, the third was brought to me this very morning by a groom without livery, who would not tell me in whose service he was, and who affirmed he had received orders from his master —"

"Or his mistress," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"It makes no difference," said Aramis; "and who affirmed, as I said, that he had received orders from his mistress to place the horse in my stable, without informing me where it came from."

"Well, this being so, we can manage famously," said D'Artagnan; "which of the two horses will you ride — the one you bought, or the one that was given to you?"

"The one that was given to me, of course, — you cannot for a moment imagine, D'Artagnan, that I should commit such an offence toward —"

"The unknown giver," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Or the mysterious benefactress," said Athos.

"So the one you bought will be useless to you?"

"Nearly so."

"And you selected it yourself?"

"With the greatest care: the safety of the horseman, you know, almost always depends on his horse."

"Well, let me have it at the price it cost you?"

"I was going to make you the offer, my dear D'Artagnan, giving you all the time necessary for repaying me such a trifle."

"How much did it cost you?"

"Eight hundred livres."

"Here are forty double pistoles, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, taking the sum from his pocket; "I know this is the coin in which you are paid for your poems."

"You are abounding in money, are you?" said Aramis.

"Money! Rolling in it, my dear fellow!"

And D'Artagnan ostentatiously jingled the rest of his pistoles in his pocket.

"Send your saddle, then, to the hôtel of the musketeers, and your horse will be brought back with ours."

"Very well; but it is almost five o'clock, so make haste."

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Porthos appeared at the end of the Rue Férou, mounted on a very handsome jennet; Mousqueton followed him upon an Auvergne horse, small, but very good-looking; Porthos was resplendent with joy and pride.

At the same time Aramis made his appearance at the other end of the street, on a superb English charger; Bazin followed him on a roan, leading a vigorous Mecklenburg horse; this last was D'Artagnan's.

The two musketeers met at the gate; Athos and D'Artagnan were watching their approach from the window.

"The devil!" cried Aramis; "you have a magnificent horse there, my dear Porthos."

"Yes," replied Porthos, "it is the one that ought to have been sent to me at first; a bad joke of the husband's substituted the other; but the husband has been punished since, and I have obtained full satisfaction."

Planchet and Grimaud then appeared leading their masters' horses. D'Artagnan and Athos came down, joined their comrades, and all four set forward: Athos on a horse he owed to his wife, Aramis on a horse he owed to his mistress, Porthos on a horse he owed to his *procureuse*, and D'Artagnan on a horse he owed to his good fortune, the best mistress possible.

The lackeys followed.

As Porthos had foreseen, the cavalcade produced a good effect; and if Madame Coquenard had met Porthos, and seen what a superb appearance he made on his handsome Spanish jennet, she would not have regretted the bleeding she had inflicted on her husband's strong-box.

Near the Louvre the four friends chanced to meet M. de Tréville, who was returning from St. Germain. He stopped them to offer his compliments on their superb outfit, and this in an instant drew round them some hundreds of gapers.

D'Artagnan took advantage of the opportunity to speak to M. de Tréville of the letter with the great red seal and the ducal arms.

M. de Tréville approved the resolution he had adopted, and assured him that if on the next day he did not appear, he himself would be able to find him, wherever he was.

At this moment the clock of La Samaritaine struck six; the four friends pleaded an engagement, and took leave of M. de Tréville.

A short gallop brought them to the Chaillot road. The day was beginning to decline, carriages were passing and repassing. D'Artagnan, watched at some distance by his friends, darted a scrutinizing glance into every carriage that appeared, but saw no face with which he was acquainted.

At length, after waiting a quarter of an hour, and just as it was quite twilight, a carriage appeared, coming at full speed, on the road to Sèvres. A presentiment instantly told D'Artagnan that this carriage contained the person who had appointed the rendezvous. The young man was himself astonished to feel his heart beating so violently. Almost instantly a woman put her head out at the window, with two fingers placed on her mouth, either to enjoin silence or to send him a kiss. D'Artagnan uttered a slight cry of joy. This woman, or rather this apparition,—for the carriage passed with the rapidity of a vision,—was Madame Bonacieux.

By an involuntary movement, and in spite of the injunction given, D'Artagnan started his horse to a gallop, and in a few strides overtook the carriage. But the window was hermetically shut; the vision had disappeared.

D'Artagnan then remembered the injunction contained in the anonymous note: "If you value your own life, or the life of those who love you, do not speak a word, do not make a motion which may lead any one to believe that you recognize her who exposes herself to everything for the sake of seeing you for an instant only."

He stopped, therefore, trembling, not for himself, but for the poor woman who had evidently exposed herself to great danger by appointing this rendezvous.

The carriage pursued its way, still going at a full pace, till it dashed into Paris and disappeared.

D'Artagnan remained fixed to the spot, astounded, and not knowing what to think. If it was Madame Bonacieux, and if she was returning to Paris, why this fugitive interview, why this simple exchange of a glance, why this last kiss? If, on the other side, it was not she, which was still quite possible, for the little light that remained rendered a mistake easy, — if it was not she, might it not be the beginning of some machination against him with the bait of this woman with whom it was known he was in love?

His three companions joined him. All had plainly seen a woman's head appear at the window, but none of them, except Athos, knew Madame Bonacieux. Athos's opinion was that it was she; but less preoccupied by her pretty face than D'Artagnan, he had fancied he saw another head, a man's head, in the carriage.

"If that be the case," said D'Artagnan, "they are doubtless transferring her from one prison to another. But what can they intend to do with the poor creature, and how shall I ever meet her again?"

"Friend," said Athos gravely, "remember that the dead are the only beings whom we are not likely to meet again on this earth. You know something of that, as well as I, do you not? Now, if your mistress is not dead, if we have just seen her, you will certainly find her again some day. And perhaps, my God!" added he, with that misanthropic tone which was characteristic of him, "perhaps sooner than you wish."

Half-past seven struck. The carriage was twenty minutes behind the time appointed. D'Artagnan's friends reminded him that he had a visit to pay, but at the same time observing that there was still time to recede.

But D'Artagnan was both impetuous and inquisitive. He had made up his mind that he would go to the Palais-Cardinal, and that he would learn what his Eminence had to say to him. Nothing could turn him from his purpose.

They reached the Rue Saint-Honoré, and in the Place du Palais-Cardinal they found the twelve musketeers who had been summoned, walking about in expectation of their comrades. Then only they were informed of the matter in question.

D'Artagnan was well known in the honorable corps of the king's musketeers, where it was understood that he would one day take his place; he was regarded, therefore, as already their comrade. The result was that each cordially accepted the duty for which he had been summoned. Besides, in all

probability, they were going to have a chance to play the cardinal and his people an ill turn, and for such expeditions these worthy gentlemen were always ready.

Athos divided them into three groups, assumed the command of one, gave the second to Aramis and the third to Porthos, and then each group went and took up its position opposite one of the entrances.

D'Artagnan, on his part, entered boldly at the front gate.

Though he felt himself ably supported, the young man was not without some anxiety as he ascended the great staircase of the palace step by step. His treatment of milady bore a strong resemblance to treachery, and he suspected the political relations which existed between that woman and the cardinal; still further, De Wardes, whom he had treated so ill in their encounter at the gates of Calais, was one of his Eminence's faithful followers, and D'Artagnan knew that while his Eminence was terrible to his enemies, he was strongly attached to his friends.

"If De Wardes has related all our affair to the cardinal, which is not to be doubted, and if he recognized me, which is probable, I may consider myself almost as a condemned man," said D'Artagnan, shaking his head. "But why has he waited till now? It's all plain enough: milady must have entered her complaint against me with that hypocritical grief which renders her so interesting, and this last offence must have made her cup overflow."

"Fortunately," he added, "my good friends are down yonder, and they will not allow me to be carried away without taking my part. Still M. de Tréville's company of musketeers alone cannot maintain a war against the cardinal, who disposes of the forces of all France, and before whom, alas! the queen is without power and the king without will. D'Artagnan, my dear, you are brave, you are prudent, you have excellent qualities, but the women will be the ruin of you."

He came to this melancholy conclusion as he entered the ante-chamber. He placed his letter in the hands of the usher on duty, who showed him into the waiting-room and passed on into the interior of the palace.

In this waiting-room were five or six of the cardinal's guards, who recognized D'Artagnan, and, knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, looked upon him with a smile of singular significance.

This smile seemed ominous to D'Artagnan; but as our Gascon was not easily intimidated, or rather, by reason of the great pride

natural to the men of his country, he did not readily reveal what was passing in his mind when what was passing resembled fear, he stood haughtily in front of the guards, and waited with his hand on his hip, in an attitude by no means deficient in majesty.

The usher returned and made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow him. It appeared to the young man that the guards, on seeing him depart, were whispering among themselves.

He passed along a corridor, crossed a large drawing-room, entered a library, and found himself in the presence of a man seated at a desk and writing.

The usher introduced him and retired without speaking a word. D'Artagnan remained standing and examined this man.

D'Artagnan at first believed that he had to do with some judge examining his papers, but he perceived that the man at the desk was writing or rather correcting lines of unequal length by scanning the words on his fingers; he saw that he was in presence of a poet. In an instant the poet closed his manuscript, on the cover of which was written *Mirame, a Tragedy in Five Acts*, and raised his head.

D'Artagnan recognized the cardinal.

CHAPTER XL.

A TERRIBLE VISION.

THE cardinal leaned his elbow on his manuscript, his cheek on his hand, and looked at the young man for a moment. No one had a more searching eye than Cardinal Richelieu, and D'Artagnan felt this look run through his veins like a fever.

He, however, kept up a brave face, holding his hat in his hand, and awaiting his Eminence's good pleasure without too much assurance, but without too much humility.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "are you a D'Artagnan from Béarn?"

"Yes, monseigneur," replied the young man.

"If I am not mistaken there are several branches of the D'Artagnans at Tarbes and its vicinity," said the cardinal; "to which do you belong?"

"I am the son of the one who served in the religious wars under the great King Henry, his gracious Majesty's father."

"That is it. Seven or eight months ago you started from your country to seek your fortune in the capital?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You came through Meung, where something befell you, I don't very well remember what, but still something."

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "this is what happened to me —"

"No matter, no matter!" resumed the cardinal, with a smile which proved that he knew the story as well as he who wished to relate it. "You had a letter of introduction to M. de Tréville, had you not?"

"Yes, monseigneur, but in that unfortunate affair at Meung —"

"The letter was lost," replied his Eminence; "yes, I know that; but M. de Tréville is a skilful physiognomist, who knows men at first sight; and he placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, M. des Essarts, leaving you to hope that some day you should enter the musketeers."

"Monseigneur is quite correctly informed," said D'Artagnan.

"Since that time many things have happened to you: you were walking one day behind the Chartreux, when it would have been better for you if you had been elsewhere. Then you took with your friends a journey to the waters of Forges; they stopped on the way, but you went on. That is all very simple — you had business in England."

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, quite confused, "I went—"

"Hunting at Windsor or elsewhere; that concerns nobody. I am acquainted with the circumstances, because it is my business to know everything. On your return you were received by an august personage, and I perceive with pleasure that you preserve the souvenir she gave you."

D'Artagnan placed his hand on the diamond which the queen had given him.

"The day after that, you received a visit from Cavois," resumed the cardinal; "he went to desire you to call at the palace; you did not make that visit, and you were wrong."

"Monseigneur, I feared I had incurred your Eminence's disfavor."

"How could that be, sir? By following the orders of your superiors with more intelligence and courage than another would have done, would you incur disfavor when you deserve praise? I punish people who do not obey, and not those who, like you, obey but too well. As a proof, remember the date of the day when I had you summoned to me, and search in your memory for what happened that very night."

It was the very evening when Madame Bonacieux's abduction took place; D'Artagnan trembled; and he likewise recollected that half an hour before the poor woman had passed close to him, without doubt, carried away once more by the same power that had caused her disappearance.

"In short," continued the cardinal, "as I have heard nothing of you for some time, I wished to know what you were doing. Besides, you owe me some thanks: you must yourself have remarked how considerably you have been treated in all these circumstances."

D'Artagnan bowed respectfully.

"That," continued the cardinal, "arose not only from a feeling of natural justice, but also from a plan I had marked out with respect to you."

D'Artagnan became more and more astonished.

"I wished to explain this plan to you on the day you received my first invitation; but you did not come. Fortunately nothing is lost by this delay, and now you are about to hear it. Sit down there, before me, Monsieur D'Artagnan; you are enough of a nobleman not to listen standing."

And the cardinal pointed with his finger to a chair for the young man, who was so amazed at what was going on that he waited for a second sign from the cardinal before he obeyed.

"You are brave, Monsieur D'Artagnan," continued his Eminence; "you are prudent, which is still better. I like men of head and heart. Don't be afraid," said he, smiling; "by men of heart I mean men of courage; but though you are young and have hardly entered on life, you have powerful enemies; if you do not take heed, they will destroy you!"

"Alas! monseigneur!" replied the young man, "very easily, no doubt; for they are strong and well supported, while I am alone!"

"Yes, that's true. But, alone as you are, you have already done much, and will do still more, I doubt not. And yet you need, I believe, to be guided in the adventurous career you have chosen, for, if I mistake not, you came to Paris with the ambitious idea of making your fortune."

"I am at the age of extravagant hopes, monseigneur," said D'Artagnan.

"There are no extravagant hopes save for fools, sir, and you are a man of brains. Now, what would you say to an ensign's commission in my guards, and a company after the campaign?"

"Ah! monseigneur!"

"You accept, do you not?"

"Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

"What! do you decline?" cried the cardinal, in astonishment.

"I am in his Majesty's guards, monseigneur, and I have no reason to be dissatisfied."

"But it seems to me that my guards are also his Majesty's guards, and whoever serves in a French corps serves the king."

"Monseigneur, your Eminence has misunderstood my words."

"You want a pretext, do you not? I understand. Well, a pretext you have. Advancement, the opening campaign, the opportunity which I offer you, — so much for the world. As regards yourself, the need of certain protection; for it is well for you to know, Monsieur D'Artagnan, that I have received serious complaints against you; you do not consecrate your days and nights to the king's service alone."

D'Artagnan colored.

"In fact," said the cardinal, laying his hand on a pile of papers. "I have here a whole bundle concerning you; but before reading them I wanted to talk with you. I know you are a man of resolution, and your services, well directed, instead of leading you to misfortune, might bring you great advantage. Come, reflect and decide."

"Your goodness confounds me, monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "and I recognize in your Eminence a generosity that makes me mean as an earth-worm; but since monseigneur permits me to speak freely —"

D'Artagnan paused.

"Yes — speak."

"Then I will tell your Eminence that all my friends are in the king's musketeers and guards, and, by an inconceivable fatality, all my enemies are in your Eminence's service. I should, therefore, be ill received here and ill regarded there, if I accepted what monseigneur offers me."

"Do you possibly conceive the proud idea that I do not offer you a place equal to your merit, sir?" asked the cardinal, with a disdainful smile.

"Monseigneur, your Eminence is a hundred times too good to me; on the contrary, I think I have not yet proved myself worthy of your goodness. The siege of Rochelle is about to begin, monseigneur; I shall serve under your Eminence's eye,

and if I have the good fortune to conduct myself at this siege in such a manner as to attract your attention, well and good! Then I shall at least have back of me some brilliant action to justify the protection with which you deign to honor me. Everything must have its own time, monseigneur; hereafter, perhaps, I shall have the right of giving myself: at present, I should appear to be selling myself."

"That is to say, you refuse to serve me, sir," said the cardinal, in a tone of vexation, through which, however, a sort of esteem manifested itself; "remain free, then, and preserve your hatreds and your sympathies."

"Monseigneur —"

"Well! well!" said the cardinal, "I am not angry with you, but you are aware it is enough to defend and reward our friends; we owe nothing to our enemies; and yet I will give you a piece of advice: take good care of yourself, Monsieur D'Artagnan, for, from the moment I withdraw my hand from you, I would not give an obole for your life."

"I will try to do so, monseigneur," replied the Gascon, with a noble confidence.

"Remember by and bye, at some moment when mischance may happen to you," said Richelieu pointedly, "that I came to seek you, and that I did all in my power to prevent this misfortune befalling you."

"Whatever may happen," said D'Artagnan, placing his hand on his heart and bowing, "I shall entertain an eternal gratitude toward your Eminence for what you are now doing for me."

"Well, let it be, then, as you have said, Monsieur D'Artagnan; we shall meet again after the campaign; I will have my eye on you, for I shall be there," replied the cardinal, pointing with his finger to a magnificent suit of armor he was to wear, "and on our return, well — we will settle our account!"

"Ah! monseigneur!" cried D'Artagnan, "spare me the weight of your disfavor; remain neutral, monseigneur, if you find that I act as a gentleman ought to act."

"Young man," said Richelieu, "if I am able once again to say to you what I have said to you to-day, I promise you to do so."

This last expression of Richelieu's conveyed a terrible doubt; it alarmed D'Artagnan more than a threat would have done, for it was a warning. The cardinal, then, was trying to preserve him from some threatened misfortune. He opened

his mouth to reply, but, with a gesture, the cardinal dismissed him.

D'Artagnan went out, but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he was on the point of going back. But Athos's noble, stern face recurred to him: if he made with the cardinal the proposed compact, Athos would no longer give him his hand, Athos would renounce him.

This was the fear that restrained him. Thus powerful is the influence of a truly great character on all its surroundings.

D'Artagnan descended by the same staircase which he had entered, and found Athos and the four musketeers waiting for him at the gate, and beginning to grow uneasy. With a word D'Artagnan reassured them, and Planchet ran to inform the other sentinels that it was needless to keep guard longer, as his master had come out safe and sound from the Palais-Cardinal.

When they reached Athos's residence, Aramis and Porthos inquired as to the cause of this strange interview; but D'Artagnan confined himself to telling them that Richelieu had sent for him to propose to him to enter his guards with the rank of ensign, and that he had refused.

"And you were right," cried Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a deep revery and made no remark. But when they were alone —

"You have done your duty, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "but yet perhaps you have done wrong."

D'Artagnan sighed deeply, for this voice responded to a secret voice of his soul, which told him that great misfortunes were awaiting him.

The whole of the next day was spent in preparations for departure. D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Tréville. At that time it was still believed that the separation of the musketeers and the guards would be only temporary, as the king was holding his parliament that very day, and proposed to set out the day after. M. de Tréville contented himself with asking D'Artagnan if he could do anything for him, but D'Artagnan answered that he was supplied with all he wanted.

That night all the comrades of the company of M. des Essarts's guards, and of the company of M. de Tréville's musketeers, who had struck up a mutual friendship, came together. They were parting to meet again when it should please God, and if it should please God. The night, therefore, was a somewhat riotous one, as may be imagined, for in such cases

extreme preoccupation can be combated only by extreme carelessness.

At the first sound of the morning trumpet the friends separated, the musketeers hastening to M. de Tréville's hôtel, the guards to M. des Essarts's. Each of the captains then led his company to the Louvre, where the king reviewed them.

The king was dull and appeared ill, which detracted somewhat from his lofty bearing. In fact, the evening before, a fever had seized him in the midst of parliament, while he was holding his bed of justice. He had nevertheless decided on setting out that same evening, and, in spite of all remonstrances, he persisted in holding the review, hoping, by a vigorous effort at first, to conquer the disease which was beginning to lay hold of him.

The review over, the guards set forward alone on their march, the musketeers waiting for the king. This allowed Porthos time to go and take a turn, in his superb equipment, in the Rue aux Ours.

The solicitor's wife saw him pass in his new uniform and on his fine horse. She loved Porthos too dearly to allow him to depart thus: she made him a sign to dismount and come to her. Porthos was magnificent, his spurs jingled, his cuirass glittered, his sword knocked proudly against his leg. This time the clerks had no desire to laugh, such an ear-clipper did Porthos appear.

The musketeer was brought into the presence of M. Coquenard, whose little gray eye sparkled with anger at seeing his cousin all blazing new. Nevertheless, one thing afforded him inward consolation: it was expected by every one that the campaign would be severe; he hoped quietly in the bottom of his heart that Porthos might be killed in the course of it.

Porthos paid his compliments to M. Coquenard, and bade him farewell. Master Coquenard wished him all sorts of prosperities. Madame Coquenard could not restrain her tears, but no evil conclusions were deducible from her grief; she was known to be much attached to her relatives, about whom she was constantly having bitter quarrels with her husband.

But the real adieux were made in Madame Coquenard's chamber; they were heart-rending!

As long as the *procureuse* could follow her lover with her eyes, she waved her handkerchief, leaning so far out of the window as to lead people to believe she was about to throw herself out. Porthos received all these marks of friendship

like a man accustomed to such demonstrations. Only as he turned the corner of the street, he lifted his hat, and waved it to her as a sign of adieu.

On his part, Aramis wrote a long letter. To whom? No one knew. Kitty, who was to set out that evening for Tours, was waiting in the next chamber, where she had found refuge.

Athos sipped the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

Meantime, D'Artagnan was marching off with his company. On arriving at the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, he turned round to look gayly at the Bastille; but as he looked at the Bastille alone he did not observe milady, who, mounted upon a light bay horse, was pointing him out to two ill-looking men who immediately came close up to the ranks to take notice of him. To a questioning look milady signified that it was he. Then, certain that there could no longer be any mistake in the execution of her orders, she gave spurs to her horse and disappeared.

The two men then followed the company, and, on leaving the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, mounted two horses properly equipped, which a servant out of livery was holding in expectation of their coming.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SIEGE OF ROCHELLE.

THE siege of Rochelle was one of the great political events of Louis XIII.'s reign, and one of the cardinal's great military enterprises. It is therefore interesting, and even necessary, that we should say a few words about it; moreover many details of this siege are connected in too important a manner with the story we have undertaken to relate to allow us to pass it over in silence.

The cardinal's political views when he undertook this siege were considerable. Let us unfold them first, and then we will pass on to his private views, which, perhaps, had not less influence on his Eminence than the former.

Of the important cities given up by Henry IV. to the Huguenots as places of safety, there remained only Rochelle. It became necessary, therefore, to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism, a dangerous leaven, with which the ferments of civil revolt and foreign war were constantly mingling.

Spaniards, English and Italian malcontents, adventurers of all nations, soldiers of fortune of every sect, flocked at the

first summons to the standards of the Protestants, and organized themselves as it were into a vast association, the various branches of which spread at leisure over all parts of Europe.

Rochelle, which had derived a new importance from the ruin of the other Calvinist cities, was then the focus of dissensions and ambitions. Moreover, its port was the last gateway in the kingdom of France open to the English, and by closing it against England, our eternal enemy, the cardinal completed the work of Joan of Arc and the Duc de Guise.

Thus Bassompierre, who was at once a Protestant and a Catholic—a Protestant by conviction and a Catholic as commander of the order of the Holy Ghost; Bassompierre, who was a German by birth and a Frenchman at heart; in short, Bassompierre, who had an especial command at the siege of Rochelle, said, as he charged at the head of several other Protestant nobles like himself:

“You will see, gentlemen, that we shall be fools enough to take Rochelle.”

And Bassompierre was right: the cannonade of the Isle of Ré presaged to him the dragonnades of the Cévennes; the taking of Rochelle was the preface to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

But as we have hinted, by the side of these views of the minister, which belong to history, the chronicler is forced to recognize the petty aims of the lover and the jealous rival.

Richelieu, as every one knows, had been in love with the queen. Was this love a purely political affair, or was it naturally one of those deep passions which Anne of Austria inspired in those who approached her? We cannot tell. But at all events, we have seen, by the preceding developments of this story, that Buckingham had got the advantage over him, and in two or three circumstances, particularly in the affair of the diamond studs, had, thanks to the three musketeers' devotion and D'Artagnan's courage, cruelly cheated him.

Richelieu's object was therefore not only to rid France of an enemy, but to avenge himself on a rival; moreover this vengeance was to be great and brilliant, and worthy in every way of a man who holds in his hand the forces of a whole kingdom.

Richelieu knew that in fighting England he was fighting Buckingham—that in triumphing over England he would triumph over Buckingham; in short, that in humiliating

England in the eyes of Europe he humiliated Buckingham in the eyes of the queen.

On his side, Buckingham, while pretending to maintain the honor of England, was moved by interests exactly similar to the cardinal's. Buckingham, also, was pursuing a private vengeance. Under no pretext had Buckingham been able to enter France as an ambassador: he wished to enter it as a conqueror.

The result was that the real stake of this game, which two most powerful kingdoms were playing for the good pleasure of two men in love, was simply — a look from Anne of Austria.

The first advantage had been gained by the Duke of Buckingham. Arriving unexpectedly in sight of the Isle of Ré, with ninety vessels and nearly twenty thousand men, he had surprised the Comte de Toirac, who commanded for the king in the island. He had, after a sanguinary conflict, effected his landing.

Let us observe, by the way, that in this fight perished the Baron de Chantal; the Baron de Chantal left a little orphan daughter of eighteen months. This little girl was afterwards Madame de Sévigné.

The Comte de Toirac withdrew into the citadel St. Martin with his garrison, and threw a hundred men into a little fort called the fort of La Prée.

This event had hastened the cardinal's resolutions, and until the king and he could come to take the command of the siege of Rochelle, which was determined on, he had sent Monsieur to direct the first operations, and had ordered all the troops he could dispose of to march toward the scene of war. Our friend D'Artagnan belonged to this detachment, sent as a vanguard.

The king, as we have said, was to follow as soon as his bed of justice was held. But on rising from his bed of justice on the 28th of June, he felt himself attacked by fever. He was, notwithstanding, anxious to set out; but his illness becoming more serious, he was obliged to stop at Villeroi.

Now, whenever the king stopped the musketeers stopped. The consequence was that D'Artagnan, who was still in the guards, found himself, for the time at least, separated from his good friends, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos. This separation, which was only an unpleasant circumstance for him, would surely have become a cause of serious anxiety if he could have guessed by what unknown dangers he was surrounded.

He arrived, however, without accident, in the camp established before Rochelle, toward the 10th of September, 1627.

Everything was unchanged: the Duke of Buckingham and his English, masters of the Isle of Ré, were still besieging, but unsuccessfully, the citadel of St. Martin and the fort of La Prée; and hostilities with Rochelle had begun, two or three days before, about a fort which the Duc d'Angoulême had just built near the city.

The guards, under M. des Essarts's command, took up their quarters at the Minimes.

But, as we know, D'Artagnan, preoccupied by the ambition of passing into the musketeers, had formed but few friendships among his comrades. He found himself isolated, and given over to his own reflections. His reflections were not cheerful. During the two years he had been in Paris, by mixing in public affairs, he, a puny creature, had made a great enemy of the cardinal, before whom the most powerful grandees of the kingdom, even the king himself, trembled. That man had the power to crush him, and yet he had not done it. For a mind so quick as D'Artagnan's, this indulgence was a light by which he caught a glimpse of a better future.

And then he had made another enemy; not so much to be feared, he thought, but nevertheless he instinctively felt not to be despised: the enemy was milady.

True he had acquired the Queen's protection and good-will; but the queen's good-will was, just then, an additional cause of persecution; and her protection, we know, was a very poor one, as instanced in Chalais and Madame Bonacieux.

The most certain thing he had clearly gained in all this was the diamond, worth five or six thousand livres, which he wore on his finger; and even this diamond, supposing that D'Artagnan, in his ambitious projects, wished to keep it, to make it some day a reminder of the queen's gratitude, had not, in the meanwhile, since he could not part with it, more value than the pebbles he trod under his feet. We say than the pebbles he trod under his feet, for D'Artagnan made these reflections while walking alone along a pretty little road leading from the camp to the village of Angoutin. Now, these reflections had led him farther than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline, when, in the last ray of the setting sun, he thought he saw a musket-barrel glittering behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye and ready wit. He realized that the musket had not come there of itself, and that he

who carried it had not concealed himself behind a hedge with any friendly intentions. He determined, therefore, to direct his course as far away from it as he could, when, behind a rock on the opposite side of the road, he perceived the muzzle of another musket-barrel.

It was evidently an ambushade.

The young man cast a glance at the first musket, and with a certain degree of anxiety saw that it was levelled in his direction; but as soon as he perceived that the mouth of the barrel was motionless, he threw himself flat on the ground; at the same instant the gun was fired, and he heard a ball whistle over his head.

No time was to be lost. D'Artagnan sprang up with a bound, and at the same instant the ball from the other musket tore up the stones on the very place on the road where he had thrown himself face to the ground.

D'Artagnan was not one of those uselessly brave men who seek a ridiculous death, in order that it may be said of them that they did not give way a single step; besides, courage was out of the question now: he had fallen into a trap.

"Should there be a third shot," said he to himself, "I am a lost man."

And immediately, taking to his heels, he ran toward the camp, with the swiftness of the young men of his country, so renowned for their agility; but great as was his speed, the one who had first fired, having had time to reload, fired a second shot, so well aimed this time that the bullet struck his hat and carried it ten paces from him.

However, as D'Artagnan had no other hat, he picked up this as he ran, and arrived at his quarters, very pale and quite out of breath. He sat down without saying a word to anybody, and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes:

The first and the most natural: it might be an ambushade of the Rochellais, who would not be sorry to kill one of his Majesty's guards; first because there would be one enemy less, and then because this enemy might have a well-furnished purse in his pocket.

D'Artagnan took his hat, examined the hole made by the bullet, and shook his head. The ball was not a musket-ball, it was an arquebuse-ball. The accuracy of the aim had first given him the idea that a particular kind of weapon had been employed. It could not, then, be a military ambushade, as the ball was not of the regulation calibre.

It might be a kind remembrance of the cardinal's. We remember that at the very moment when, owing to the blessed ray of the sun, he perceived the gun-barrel, he was thinking with astonishment on his Eminence's forbearance toward him.

But D'Artagnan shook his head. For people against whom he had only to stretch out his hand, his Eminence had rarely recourse to such means.

It might be a vengeance of milady's.

That was the most probable!

He vainly tried to remember the faces or dress of the assassins; he had run away so swiftly that he had not had leisure to notice anything.

"Ah! my poor friends!" murmured D'Artagnan; "where are you? How sadly I need you!"

D'Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he started up, imagining that a man was approaching his bed to stab him. Nevertheless, day dawned without the darkness bringing any event.

But D'Artagnan realized that what was deferred was not lost. He remained all day in his quarters, assigning as a reason to himself that the weather was bad.

At nine o'clock the next morning, the drums beat the salute. The Duc d'Orléans was inspecting the posts. The guards ran to their arms, and D'Artagnan took his place in the midst of his comrades.

Monsieur passed along the front of the line. Then all the superior officers approached him to pay him their compliments, M. des Essarts, captain of the guards, among the rest.

At the end of a moment D'Artagnan imagined that M. des Essarts made him a sign to come to him. He waited for a fresh gesture on the part of his superior, for fear he might be mistaken; but when this gesture was repeated, he left the ranks, and advanced to receive his orders.

"Monsieur is about to ask for some gallant men for a dangerous mission, but one that will do honor to those who shall accomplish it, and I made you a sign in order that you might hold yourself in readiness."

"Thank you, captain!" replied D'Artagnan, who desired nothing more than to distinguish himself in the lieutenant-general's eyes.

It seems the Rochellais had made a sortie during the night, and had retaken a bastion which the royal army had gained possession of two days before; the point was to ascertain, by reconnoitring, how the enemy guarded this bastion.

In fact, at the end of a few minutes, Monsieur raised his voice and said :

"I want, for this mission, three or four volunteers, led by a trusty man."

"As to the trusty man, I have him at hand, monseigneur," said M. des Essarts, pointing to D'Artagnan; "and as to the four or five volunteers, monseigneur has but to make his intentions known, and the men will not be wanting."

"Four gallant men who will risk being killed with me!" said D'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his comrades of the guards immediately sprang forward, and two soldiers having joined them, the number was deemed sufficient; so D'Artagnan declined all others, as he was unwilling to injure the chances of those who came forward first.

It was not known whether, after taking the bastion, the Rochellais had evacuated it or left a garrison in it; so the object was to examine the place near enough to ascertain.

D'Artagnan set out with his four companions, and followed the trench; the two guardsmen marched abreast with him, and the two soldiers followed behind.

Screened by the revêtement, they came within a hundred paces of the bastion. There, on turning round, D'Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared.

He thought that they had stayed behind from fear, and so he continued to advance.

At the turning of the counterscarp they found themselves within about sixty paces of the bastion.

No one was to be seen, and the bastion seemed abandoned.

The three men of the forlorn hope were deliberating whether to proceed any farther, when suddenly a circle of smoke enveloped the stone giant, and a dozen balls came whistling round D'Artagnan and his two companions.

They knew what they wanted to know: the bastion was guarded. A longer stay in this dangerous spot would therefore have been uselessly imprudent. D'Artagnan and his two companions turned their backs, and beat a retreat like a flight.

On arriving at the angle of the trench which was to serve them as a rampart, one of the guardsmen fell; a ball had passed through his breast. The other, who was safe and sound, kept on his way to camp.

D'Artagnan was not willing to abandon his companion thus, and stooped down to raise him and assist him in regaining the lines: but at this moment two shots were fired; one ball hit

the head of the already wounded guardsman, and the other flattened itself against a rock, after passing within two inches of D'Artagnan.

The young man turned quickly round, for this attack could not come from the bastion, which was masked by the angle of the trench. The idea of the two soldiers who had abandoned him occurred to his mind, and reminded him of the assassins of two evenings before. So he resolved this time to satisfy himself on this point, and fell on his comrade's body as though he were dead.

He instantly saw two heads appearing above an abandoned work, within thirty paces of him; they were the heads of his two soldiers. D'Artagnan had not been mistaken: these two men had followed him only for the purpose of assassinating him, expecting that the young man's death would be placed to the enemy's account.

But, as he might be merely wounded and might accuse them of their crime, they came up to him with the purpose of making sure of him. Fortunately, deceived by D'Artagnan's trick, they neglected to reload their guns.

When they were within ten paces of him, D'Artagnan, who in falling had taken great care not to let go his sword, suddenly got up, and with one leap came upon them.

The assassins realized that if they fled toward the camp without killing their man, they should be accused by him; therefore, their first idea was to desert to the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel, and used it as he would a club; he aimed a terrible blow at D'Artagnan, who dodged it by springing on one side; but by this movement he left free passage to the bandit, who at once darted off toward the bastion. As the Rochellais who guarded the bastion were ignorant of the intentions of the man they saw coming toward them, they fired at him, and he fell, struck by a ball which broke his shoulder.

Meantime, D'Artagnan had thrown himself on the other soldier, attacking him with his sword; the struggle was not long; the wretch had nothing to defend himself with but his discharged arquebuse; the guardsman's sword slipped down the barrel of the now useless weapon, and pierced the thigh of the assassin, who fell.

D'Artagnan immediately placed the point of the weapon at his throat.

"Oh, do not kill me!" cried the bandit. "Pardon, pardon, officer, and I will tell you all!"

"Is your secret important enough for me to spare your life, I wonder?" asked the young man, withholding his arm.

"Yes! if you think existence worth anything to a man of twenty-two, as you are, and who have everything to hope for, being handsome and brave, as you are."

"Wretch!" cried D'Artagnan, "see here, speak quickly! Who employed you to assassinate me?"

"A woman whom I don't know, but who is called milady."

"But if you don't know this woman, how do you know her name?"

"My comrade knew her, and called her so; she made the bargain with him, and not with me; he has even now in his pocket a letter from that person, which must be of great importance to you, judging by what I have heard."

"But how are you concerned in this ambushade?"

"He proposed to me to undertake it with him, and I agreed."

"And how much did she give you for this fine enterprise?"

"A hundred louis."

"Well, good enough!" said the young man, laughing; "she thinks I am worth something! A hundred louis! Well, that was a temptation for two miserable creatures like you; so I understand you accepted it, and I grant you my pardon; but on one condition!"

"What is that?" said the soldier, uneasy at perceiving that all was not over.

"That you go and fetch me the letter your comrade has in his pocket."

"Why," cried the bandit, "that is only another way of killing me. How can you wish me to go and fetch that letter under the fire from the bastion?"

"Nevertheless you must make up your mind to go and fetch it, or I swear you shall die by my hand."

"Pardon! sir, have pity on me! In the name of the young lady you love, and who you perhaps think is dead, but is not!" cried the bandit, throwing himself on his knees and leaning on his hand, for he began to lose his strength with his blood.

"And how do you know there is a young woman whom I love, or that I thought that woman dead?" asked D'Artagnan.

"By the letter which my comrade has in his pocket."

"You see, then," said D'Artagnan, "that I must have that letter. So no more delay, no more hesitation; or else, whatever may be my repugnance to soiling my sword a second time

with the blood of a wretch like you, I swear on the faith of an honorable man —”

And at these words D'Artagnan made such a threatening gesture that the wounded man sprang up.

“Stop, stop!” cried he, regaining courage from his very terror, “I will go — I will go!”

D'Artagnan took the soldier's arquebuse, made him go on before him, and drove him toward his companion by pricking him behind with his sword.

It was a frightful thing to see this unfortunate being, leaving a long track of blood on the ground he passed over, pale with approaching death, trying to drag himself along, without being seen, to his accomplice's body, which lay at twenty paces from him.

Terror was so strongly painted on his face, covered with a cold sweat, that D'Artagnan took pity on him, and casting on him a look of contempt —

“Well,” said he, “I will show you the difference between a man of true courage and a coward, as you are; stay, I will go.”

And, with a light step, an eye on the watch, observing the movements of the enemy and taking advantage of all the aid afforded by the nature of the ground, D'Artagnan succeeded in reaching the second soldier.

There were two means of attaining his object: to search him on the spot, or to carry him away, making a buckler of his body, and then search him in the trench.

D'Artagnan preferred the second means, and lifted the assassin on his shoulders at the very moment the enemy fired.

A slight shock, the dull thud of three balls penetrating the flesh, a last cry, a convulsion of agony, proved to D'Artagnan that the man who had just tried to assassinate him had saved his life.

D'Artagnan regained the trench, and threw the body down by the wounded man, who was as pale as death.

He instantly began the search: a leather pocket-book, a purse in which was evidently a part of the sum which the bandit had received, a dice-box and dice, formed the dead man's heritage.

He left the box and dice where they fell, flung the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocket-book.

Among some unimportant papers he found the following letter; the one which he had gone to get at the risk of his life:

“Since you have lost track of that woman, and she is now

in safety in the convent, which you should never have allowed her to reach, try, at least, not to miss the man; if you do, you know that my hand reaches far, and that you shall repay me very dearly the hundred louis you have had of me."

No signature. Nevertheless it was plain the letter came from milady. He consequently kept it as a piece of evidence, and as he was in safety behind the angle of the trench, he began to question the wounded man. He confessed that he had undertaken, with his comrade, the man just killed, to abduct a young woman about to leave Paris by the gate of La Villette; but having stopped to drink at a saloon, they had missed the carriage by ten minutes.

"But what were you to have done with the woman?" asked D'Artagnan, in great agitation.

"We were to have conveyed her to a hôtel in the Place Royale," said the wounded man.

"Yes! yes!" murmured D'Artagnan; "that's the place; milady's own residence!"

Then the young man shuddering felt what a terrible thirst of vengeance impelled this woman to destroy him, as well as those who loved him, and how well acquainted she must be with affairs of the court, since she had discovered everything. Doubtless she owed this information to the cardinal.

But he also perceived, with a feeling of genuine joy, that the queen must have at last discovered the prison in which poor Madame Bonacieux was expiating her devotion, and that she had freed her from that prison. And the letter he had received from the young woman, and her passing along the Chaillot road like an apparition, were now explained.

Hereafter, as Athos had predicted, it was possible that he should find Madame Bonacieux, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea completely restored clemency to his heart. He turned to the wounded man, who had watched with intense anxiety all the varying expressions of his countenance, and holding out his arm to him—

"Come," said he, "I will not abandon you thus. Lean upon me, and let us return to camp."

"Yes," said the man, who could scarcely believe in such magnanimity, "but is it not to have me hanged?"

"You have my word," said he; "for the second time I give you your life."

The wounded man sank upon his knees, and again kissed his preserver's feet, but D'Artagnan, who no longer had a

motive for staying so near the enemy, cut short the evidences of his gratitude.

The guardsman who had returned at the first discharge had announced the death of his four companions. There was therefore much astonishment and delight in the regiment when the young man was seen to come back safe and sound.

D'Artagnan explained the sword-wound of his companion by a sortie which he improvised. He told of the other soldier's death and the perils they had encountered. This recital was for him the occasion of a veritable triumph. The whole army talked of this expedition for a day, and Monsieur sent him his compliments on it.

Moreover, as every great action brings its own recompense, D'Artagnan's resulted in the restoration of the tranquillity he had lost. In fact, D'Artagnan believed that he might indulge in a little tranquillity since one of his two enemies was killed, and the other devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity proved one thing, which was, that D'Artagnan did not yet know milady.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ANJOU WINE.

AFTER almost hopeless news of the king's health, the report of his convalescence began to prevail in the camp; and as he was very anxious to be at the siege in person, it was said that as soon as he could mount on horseback he would set forward.

Meantime, Monsieur, who knew that from one day to another he might be superseded in his command by the Duc d'Angoulême, or Bassompierre, or Schomberg, who were all eager for the post, did but little, wasted his time in idle experiments, and dared not risk any great enterprise to drive the English from the Isle of Ré, where they still besieged the citadel St. Martin and the fort of La Prée, while on their side the French were besieging Rochelle.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, had become more tranquil; he felt only one uneasiness, and that was at not hearing from his three friends.

But one morning early in November, everything was explained to him by this letter, dated from Villeroi :

“MONSIEUR D'ARTAGNAN:

“MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after giving an entertainment at my house and having a very gay time, created such a disturbance that the provost of the castle, a very rigid man, has had them confined for some days; but I fulfil the order they have given me, by forwarding to you a dozen bottles of my Anjou wine, with which they are much taken; they are desirous that you should drink to their health in their favorite wine.

“I have done so, and am, sir, with great respect,

“Your very humble and obedient servant,

“GODEAU,

“Steward of the Musketeers.”

“That's good!” cried D'Artagnan; “they think of me in their pleasures, as I thought of them in my troubles. Well, I will certainly drink to their health with all my heart, but I will not drink alone.”

And D'Artagnan went after two guardsmen with whom he had formed greater intimacy than with the others, to invite them to drink with him this delicious Anjou wine which had just been sent him from Villeroi.

One of the two guardsmen was engaged that evening, and the other for the next. So the meeting was fixed for the day after that.

D'Artagnan, on his return, sent the twelve bottles of wine to the mess-room of the guards, enjoining that great care be taken of it. Then at nine in the morning of the day appointed, as the dinner was fixed for twelve o'clock, D'Artagnan sent Planchet to assist in making the preparations.

Planchet, very proud of being raised to the dignity of butler, thought he would get everything ready like an intelligent man, and with this object in mind called in the assistance of the lackey of one of his master's guests, named Fourreau, and the sham soldier who had tried to kill D'Artagnan, and who, belonging to no corps, had been in D'Artagnan's service, or rather Planchet's, ever since D'Artagnan had saved his life.

The hour of the banquet having come, the two guests arrived, took their places, and the dishes were served on the table. Planchet waited, towel on arm, Fourreau uncorked the bottles, and Brisemont, as the convalescent was named, carefully poured into glass decanters the wine, which seemed to be rather muddy after the joltings of the journey. As the first bottle of this wine was a little thick at the bottom, Brisemont poured

the dregs into a glass, and D'Artagnan allowed him to drink it, for the poor devil had not as yet much strength.

The guests, after having eaten their soup, were on the point of touching the first glass of wine to their lips, when suddenly the cannon roared from Fort Louis and Fort Neuf. Instantly the guardsmen, imagining this to be caused by some unexpected attack, either of the besieged or the English, sprang to their swords; D'Artagnan, not less eager than they, did the same, and all three ran out, in order to repair to their posts.

But scarcely were they out of the mess-room, when they learned the cause of the noise: cries of "Hurrah for the king! hurrah for the cardinal!" were resounding on every side, and drums were beating in all directions.

In fact, the king, impatient as we have said he was, had made forced marches, and had just arrived with all his household and a reinforcement of ten thousand troops. His musketeers rode in front of him and behind him. D'Artagnan, standing with his company drawn up in line, saluted with an expressive gesture his friends, whom he followed with his eyes, and M. de Tréville, who instantly recognized him.

The ceremony of reception over, the four friends were soon in one another's arms.

"By Jove!" cried D'Artagnan, "you could not have arrived more opportunely; the dinner cannot have had time to cool — can it, gentlemen?" added the young man, turning to the two guardsmen, whom he introduced to his friends.

"Ah! ha!" said Porthos; "so it seems we were feasting!"

"I hope," said Aramis, "there are no women at your dinner-party."

"Is there any drinkable wine in your shanty?" asked Athos.

"Well, by Jove! there is your own, my dear friend," replied D'Artagnan.

"Our wine!" exclaimed Athos, in astonishment.

"Yes, the wine you sent me."

"We sent you wine?"

"Yes; you know what I mean: the wine from the slopes of Anjou."

"Yes, I know very well the wine you mean."

"The wine you prefer."

"Doubtless, when I can get neither champagne nor chambertin."

"Well! in the absence of champagne and chambertin, you must be satisfied with this."

"And so, connoisseurs as we are, we have had some Anjou wine sent us, have we?" exclaimed Porthos.

"No, it is the wine that was sent me with your compliments."

"With our compliments?" exclaimed the three musketeers.

"Did you send this wine, Aramis?" said Athos.

"No; and you, Porthos?"

"No; and you, Athos?"

"No!"

"Well, but if it was not you, it was your steward," said D'Artagnan.

"Our steward!"

"Yes, your steward, Godeau, the steward of the musketeers."

"'Pon my word! never mind where it comes from," said Porthos; "let us taste it, and if it is good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos, "don't drink wine which comes from an unknown source."

"You are right, Athos," said D'Artagnan. "Did none of you order Godeau to send me wine?"

"No! and yet you say he has sent you some with our compliments?"

"Here is his letter," said D'Artagnan, and he exhibited the note to his comrades.

"That is not his writing!" said Athos; "I know it. Before we left Villeroi, I settled the accounts of our crowd."

"It is a forged letter," said Porthos; "we have not been under arrest."

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a reproachful tone, "how could you believe that we had made a disturbance?"

D'Artagnan grew pale, and a convulsive trembling shook all his limbs.

"Thou alarmest me!" said Athos, who never used *thee* and *thou* but upon very particular occasions; "what has happened?"

"Hasten! hasten! friends!" cried D'Artagnan; "a horrible suspicion crosses my mind! Can this be another vengeance on that woman's part?"

Athos now turned pale.

D'Artagnan rushed towards the mess-room, the three musketeers and the two guards following him.

The first object that met D'Artagnan's eyes, on entering the dining-room, was Brisemont, stretched on the ground and rolling in horrible convulsions.

Planchet and Fourreau, pale as death, were trying to aid him; but it was plain that all assistance was useless—all the features of the dying man were distorted with the death struggle.

"Ah!" cried he, perceiving D'Artagnan, "ah! it is frightful! You pretend to pardon me, and you poison me!"

"I," cried D'Artagnan, "I, wretched man! What do you mean?"

"I say that you gave me the wine, I say that you told me to drink it, I say you wished to avenge yourself on me, and I say that it is horrible!"

"Do not think so, Brisemont," said D'Artagnan; "do not think so; I swear to you, I protest—"

"Oh! but God is above! God will punish you! My God! grant that he may one day suffer what I suffer!"

"I swear to you on the Gospel," said D'Artagnan, throwing himself down by the dying man, "that I didn't know the wine was poisoned, and I was going to drink of it as you did."

"I do not believe you," cried the soldier.

And he expired under redoubled torments.

"Frightful! frightful!" murmured Athos, while Porthos broke the bottles and Aramis gave orders, a little too late, to send for a confessor.

"Oh! my friends," said D'Artagnan, "you come once more to save my life, not only mine, but the lives of these gentlemen. Gentlemen," continued he, addressing the guardsmen, "I request you say nothing about this adventure; great personages may have had a hand in what you have seen, and if talked about, the evil would only recoil on us."

"Ah! sir!" stammered Planchet, more dead than alive, "ah! sir! what a narrow escape I have had!"

"How, sirrah! so you were going to drink my wine, were you!"

"To the king's health, sir; I was going to drink a small glass of it, if Fourreau had not told me some one was calling me."

"Alas!" said Fourreau, whose teeth chattered with terror, "I wanted to get him out of the way that I might have a drink by myself."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, addressing the guardsmen, "you will easily see that such a feast can only be very melancholy, after what has just taken place; so I beg you to accept my excuses, and put off the party till another day."

The two guardsmen courteously accepted D'Artagnan's

excuses, and perceiving that the four friends desired to be alone, they retired.

When the young guardsman and the three musketeers were without witnesses, they looked at each other with an air which plainly expressed that each of them realized the seriousness of the situation.

"In the first place," said Athos, "let us leave this room; a dead man, especially the victim of a violent death, is not agreeable company."

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "I commit this poor devil's body to your care. Let him be interred in holy ground. He committed a crime, it is true, but he repented of it."

And the four friends left the room. Planchet and Fourreau undertook the duty of paying the mortuary honors to Brisemont.

The manager gave them another room, and served them with boiled eggs, while Athos went himself to draw water at the spring. In a few words Porthos and Aramis were informed of all that had occurred.

"Well," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "you see, dear friend, that it is war to the death!"

Athos shook his head.

"The fact is we cannot remain in this way, with a sword hanging eternally over our heads," said Athos; "we must get out of this position."

"But how?"

"Listen: try to have an interview with her, and make an agreement with her; say to her: 'Peace or war, my word of honor as a gentleman never to say anything of you, never to do anything against you. On your part, a solemn oath to remain neutral with respect to me. If not, I will apply to the chancellor, I will apply to the king, I will apply to the hangman, I will move the courts against you, I will denounce you as branded, I will bring you to trial, and if you are acquitted — well, on the word of a gentleman, I will kill you, at the corner of some wall, as I would a mad dog.'"

"I like the scheme well enough," said D'Artagnan, "but how meet her?"

"Time, dear friend, time brings opportunity, opportunity is man's martingal; the more we venture, the more we gain, when we know how to wait."

"Yes, but to wait surrounded by assassins and poisoners."

"Bah!" said Athos, "God has preserved us hitherto, God will preserve us still."

"Yes, he has; besides we are men; and all things consid-

ered, it is our lot to risk our lives; but she—" added he in an undertone.

"She? who?" asked Athos.

"Constance?"

"Madame Bonacieux! Ah! that's true," said Athos; "my poor friend, I had forgotten."

"Well," said Aramis, "but have you not learned by the letter you found on the dead assassin that she is in a convent? One may be very comfortable in a convent; and as soon as the siege of Rochelle is over, I promise you, as far as I am concerned —"

"It seems some time since he heard from his mistress," said Athos, in a low voice; "but take no notice of it, we know what that means."

"Well," said Porthos, "it appears to me that there is a very simple way."

"What?" asked D'Artagnan.

"You say she is in a convent?" replied Porthos.

"Yes."

"Well, as soon as the siege is over, we'll carry her off from that convent."

"But we must find out what convent she is in."

"You are right," said Porthos.

"But I think I have it," said Athos. "Do you not believe, D'Artagnan, that it is the queen who has selected the convent for her?"

"At least I imagine so."

"In that case, Porthos will assist us."

"And how, please?"

"Why, by your marchioness, your duchess, your princess; she must have a long arm."

"Hush!" said Porthos, placing his finger on his lips, "I believe she is of the cardinal's party; she must know nothing of the matter."

"Then," said Aramis, "I take upon myself to get news of her."

"You, Aramis!" cried the three friends; "how?"

"By the queen's almoner, with whom I am very intimately acquainted."

And with this assurance, the four friends, having finished their modest repast, separated, promising to meet again that evening; D'Artagnan returned to the Minimes, and the three musketeers repaired to the king's quarters, where they had to prepare their lodging.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE TAVERN OF THE RED DOVECOTE.

MEANWHILE the king, who, though he had so recently arrived, was in such haste to face the enemy, and, with more reason than the cardinal, shared his hatred for Buckingham, desired every disposition to be made, first to drive the English from the Isle of Ré, and afterwards to press the siege of Rochelle. But in spite of himself, he was delayed by the dissensions which broke out between Bassompierre and Schomberg against the Duc d'Angoulême.

Bassompierre and Schomberg were marshals of France, and claimed their right to command the army under the king's orders; but the cardinal, fearing that Bassompierre, who was Huguenot at heart, might but feebly press the English and Rochellais, his co-religionists, supported the Duc d'Angoulême, whom the king, at his instigation, had named lieutenant-general. The result was that, to avoid seeing Bassompierre and Schomberg desert the army, they had to give a separate command to each. Bassompierre took up his quarters to the north of the city between La Leu and Dompierre; the Duc d'Angoulême to the east, between Dompierre and Perigny; and M. de Schomberg to the south, between Perigny and Angoutin.

Monsieur's headquarters were at Dompierre.

The king's headquarters were sometimes at Étré, sometimes at La Jarrie.

The cardinal's quarters were upon the downs, at the bridge of La Pierre, in a simple house without any entrenchment.

Thus Monsieur watched Bassompierre; the king, the Duc d'Angoulême; and the cardinal, M. de Schomberg.

As soon as this organization was effected, they set about driving the English from the island.

The opportunity was favorable. The English, who require, above everything, good living, in order to be good soldiers, had only salt meat and bad biscuit to eat, had many sick men in their camp. Furthermore, the sea was very rough at this period of the year on all the coasts of the ocean, and every day wrecked some vessel or other, and the shore from the point of L'Aiguillon to the trench was, at every tide, literally covered with flotsam and jetsam from pinnaces, row-barges, and feluccas. The consequence was, that even if the king's troop

should remain quietly in camp, evidently some day or other, Buckingham, who only remained on the Isle of Ré out of obstinacy, would be obliged to raise the siege.

But as M. de Toirac reported that everything in the enemy's camp was getting ready for a fresh assault, the king judged that it would be best to put an end to the affair, and gave the necessary orders for a decisive action.

As it is not our intention to write a journal of the siege, but, on the contrary, only to introduce such events of it as are connected with the story we are telling, we will content ourselves with saying in a word or two that the expedition succeeded, to the king's great astonishment and the cardinal's great glory. The English, driven back foot by foot, beaten in every skirmish, and overwhelmed in the passage of the Isle of Loix, were obliged to reëmbark, leaving on the battle-field two thousand men, among whom were five colonels, three lieutenant-colonels, two hundred and fifty captains, and twenty gentlemen of rank, four pieces of cannon, and sixty colors, which were taken to Paris by Claude de St. Simon, and suspended with great pomp in the arches of Notre Dame.

Te Deums were sung in the camp, and afterwards throughout France.

The cardinal was left free to carry on the siege without having, at least for the moment, anything to fear from the English.

An envoy of the Duke of Buckingham, named Montague, was taken, and proof was obtained of a league between the Empire, Spain, England, and Lorraine. This league was directed against France. Furthermore, in Buckingham's headquarters, which he had been forced to abandon more precipitately than he expected, papers were found confirming this league, and, as the cardinal asserts in his *Memoirs*, strongly compromising Madame de Chevreuse, and consequently the queen.

All the responsibility rested on the cardinal, for one cannot be a despotic minister without responsibility; therefore all the resources of his mighty genius were expended night and day, engaged in listening to the slightest rumor heard in any of the great kingdoms of Europe.

The cardinal was acquainted with Buckingham's activity, and more particularly his hatred; if the league threatening France should triumph, all his influence would be lost. Spanish policy and Austrian policy would have their representatives in the cabinet of the Louvre, where they had only partisans

as yet ; he, Richelieu, the French minister, the really national minister, would be ruined. The king, who, while obeying him like a child, hated him as a child hates his master, would abandon him to the personal vengeance of Monsieur and the queen, so his ruin was perhaps the ruin of France. All this had to be guarded against.

So couriers, constantly growing more numerous, were seen succeeding one another, day and night, in the little house of the bridge of La Pierre, where the cardinal had established his residence.

These were monks wearing the frock with such an ill grace that it was easy to see they belonged especially to the church militant ; women, rather awkward in their costume of pages, while their large breeches could not entirely conceal their rounded forms ; and peasants with blackened hands but fine limbs, who smacked of the man of quality a league off. In addition to these there were less agreeable visitors, for two or three times it was bruited that the cardinal had narrowly escaped assassination.

True, the cardinal's enemies declared that it was he himself who set these bungling assassins to work, in order, if need were, to have the right of retaliation ; but what ministers say, or what their enemies say, is not to be believed.

The cardinal, to whom his most inveterate detractors have never denied personal bravery, was not prevented, however, from making excursions by night, sometimes to communicate to the Duc d'Angoulême important orders ; sometimes to go and confer with the king ; sometimes to have an interview with a messenger whom he did not wish to receive at his headquarters.

On their part, the musketeers, who had not much to do with the siege, were not under very strict orders, and led a jolly life. This was all the easier for them, and for our three companions in particular, because, as they were M. de Tréville's friends, they readily obtained from him special permission to remain outside after the closing of camp.

Now, one evening, when D'Artagnan, who was in the trenches, was not able to accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted on their war-horses, enveloped in their military cloaks, with their hands on their pistol-butts, were returning from an ale-house called "The Red Dovecote," which Athos had discovered two days before on the road to La Jarrie. They were riding along on the road leading to the camp, and quite on their guard, as we have stated, for fear of an

ambuscade, when, about a quarter of a league from the village of Boinar, they fancied they heard the trampling of horses approaching them. All three instantly halted, closed in, and waited, occupying the middle of the road. In an instant, just as the moon broke out from behind a cloud, they saw appear at a turn of the road two horsemen, who, on perceiving them, stopped in their turn, seemingly to deliberate whether they should continue their route or go back. Their hesitation aroused some suspicion in the three friends, and Athos, riding a few paces in advance of the others, cried in a firm voice :

“Who goes there?”

“Who goes there, yourselves?” replied one of the two horsemen.

“That is not an answer,” replied Athos. “Who goes there? Answer, or else we charge.”

“Beware of what you are doing, gentlemen!” said a ringing voice, which appeared accustomed to command.

“It is some superior officer making his night rounds,” said Athos. “What do you mean to do, gentlemen?”

“Who are you?” said the same voice in the same commanding tone. “Answer in your turn, or you may repent of your disobedience.”

“The king’s musketeers,” said Athos, more than ever convinced that he who questioned them had the right to do so.

“What company?”

“Tréville’s.”

“Advance, and account for what you are doing here at this time.”

The three companions advanced rather humbly, for all three were now convinced that they had to do with some one more powerful than themselves, and leaving to Athos the post of spokesman.

One of the two horsemen, the one who had spoken second, was ten paces in advance of his companion. Athos signed to Porthos and Aramis to remain behind and went forward alone.

“Your pardon, officer!” said Athos; “but we were ignorant of whom we were speaking to, and you see we were keeping good guard.”

“Your name?” demanded the officer, whose face was partly covered by his cloak.

“But yourself, sir,” said Athos, who began to be annoyed by this inquisition; “I beg you to prove to me that you have the right to question me.”

"Your name?" insisted the horseman, letting his cloak fall, and leaving his face uncovered.

"The cardinal!" cried the astonished musketeer.

"Your name?" cried his Eminence for the third time.

"Athos!" said the musketeer.

The cardinal made a sign to his attendant, who drew near to him.

"These three musketeers shall follow us," said he in an undertone. "I do not wish it known I left the camp; and by following us we shall be certain they will tell no one."

"We are gentlemen, monseigneur," said Athos; "put us on our honor, and give yourself no uneasiness. Thank God! we can keep a secret."

The cardinal fixed his keen eyes on the bold speaker.

"You have a quick ear, Monsieur Athos," said the cardinal; "but now listen to this: it is not from mistrust that I ask you to follow me, but for my security; no doubt your companions are MM. Porthos and Aramis."

"Yes, your Eminence," said Athos, while the two musketeers who had remained behind advanced, hat in hand.

"I know you, gentlemen," said the cardinal, "I know you; I know you are not altogether my friends, and I am sorry for it; but I know you are brave and loyal gentlemen, and that confidence may be reposed in you. Monsieur Athos, do me the honor of accompanying me, you and your two friends, and then I shall have an escort to excite envy in his Majesty, if we should meet him."

The three musketeers bowed to the necks of their horses.

"Well, on my honor," said Athos, "your Eminence is right in taking us with you; we have seen ill-looking faces on the road, and we have even had a quarrel at the Red Dovecote with four of them."

"A quarrel — and what for, gentlemen?" asked the cardinal; "you know I don't like quarrelsome persons."

"And that is why I have the honor to inform your Eminence of what has happened; for you might learn it from others, and on a false report believe us to be in fault."

"And what was the result of your quarrel?" demanded the cardinal, knitting his brow.

"My friend Aramis here received a slight sword-wound in his arm, but it will not prevent him, as your Eminence may see, from mounting to the assault to-morrow, if your Eminence orders an escalade."

"But you are not men to allow sword-wounds to be inflicted on you in this way" said the cardinal; "come, be frank,

gentlemen, you have given some in return; confess — you know I have the right of giving absolution.”

“Monseigneur,” said Athos, “I did not even draw my sword, but I took the man who offended me round the body, and flung him out of the window; it seems that in falling,” continued Athos, with some hesitation, “he broke his hip.”

“Ah! ha!” said the cardinal; “and you, Monsieur Porthos?”

“I, monseigneur, knowing that duelling is prohibited, I seized a bench, and gave one of these brigands a blow which I believe broke his shoulder.”

“Very well!” said the cardinal; “and you, Monsieur Aramis?”

“Monseigneur, as I am of a very mild disposition, and as I am likewise about to enter into orders (which monseigneur, perhaps, does not know), I was trying to appease my comrades, when one of these wretches treacherously gave me a sword-thrust through my left arm; then my patience failed me; I drew my sword in my turn, and when he came back to the charge, I fancied I felt that in throwing himself on me he let it pass through his body; I only know, for a certainty, that he fell, and it seemed to me he was carried off with his two companions.”

“The devil, gentlemen!” said the cardinal; “three men disabled in a saloon squabble! You don’t do your work by halves. And pray what was your quarrel about?”

“These fellows were drunk,” said Athos, “and knowing that a lady had arrived at the tavern this evening, they were on the point of forcing her door.”

“Forcing her door!” said the cardinal; “and for what purpose?”

“To do her violence, without doubt,” said Athos; “I have had the honor of informing your Eminence that these wretches were drunk.”

“And was the lady young and handsome?” asked the cardinal in some anxiety.

“We did not see her, monseigneur,” said Athos.

“You did not see her! Ah! very well,” replied the cardinal quickly; “you acted quite right in defending a woman’s honor; and as I, myself, am going to the Red Dovecote, I shall know whether you have told me truth or not.”

“Monseigneur,” said Athos haughtily, “to save our lives, we would not tell a lie.”

“Therefore, I do not doubt what you say, Monsieur Athos,

I do not doubt it for a single instant; but," he added, to change the conversation, "the lady was alone, I suppose?"

"The lady had a cavalier in the room with her," said Athos, "but as this cavalier did not show himself in spite of the noise, it is to be presumed that he is a coward."

"'Judge not rashly,' says the Gospel," replied the cardinal. Athos bowed.

"And now, gentlemen, that's all very well," continued his Eminence. "I know what I wanted to know—follow me."

The three musketeers fell behind his Eminence, who again enveloped his face in his cloak and started up his horse, keeping at from eight to ten paces in advance of his four companions.

They soon reached the silent, solitary tavern. The landlord doubtless knew what illustrious visitor was coming, and had consequently sent intruders away.

At ten paces from the door the cardinal made a sign to his attendant and the three musketeers to halt. A saddled horse was fastened to the window-shutter. The cardinal knocked three times in a peculiar manner.

A man enveloped in a cloak immediately came out, and exchanged some rapid words with the cardinal; after which he got on horseback and set off in the direction of Surgères, which was likewise that of Paris.

"Advance, gentlemen," said the cardinal.

"You have told me the truth, gentlemen," said he, addressing the three musketeers, "and it will not be my fault if our meeting this evening be not advantageous to you; meanwhile follow me."

The cardinal alighted, the three musketeers followed his example. The cardinal threw the bridle of his horse to his attendant, the three musketeers fastened their horses to the shutters.

The landlord stood at the door; for him, the cardinal was only an officer coming to visit a lady.

"Have you a room on the ground floor where these gentlemen can wait, near a good fire?" the cardinal asked.

The landlord opened the door of a large room, in which a poor stove had just been replaced by a large and excellent fireplace.

"I have this, sir," said he.

"That will do," replied the cardinal; "come in, gentlemen, and be kind enough to wait for me; I shall not be more than half an hour."

And while the three musketeers were going into the ground-floor room, the cardinal, without asking further information, mounted the staircase like a man who has no need of his way being pointed out to him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE UTILITY OF STOVE-PIPES.

It was evident that, without suspecting it and actuated solely by their chivalric and adventurous characters, our three friends had just rendered a service to some one whom the cardinal honored with his special protection.

Now who was that some one? This was the question the three musketeers put to each other. Then, seeing that none of the replies their wits could furnish was satisfactory, Porthos called the landlord and asked for dice.

Porthos and Aramis sat down at the table and began to play. Athos walked about in a contemplative mood.

While thinking and walking, Athos kept passing and re-passing before the stove pipe, broken in half, the other end of which went into the upper chamber; and every time he passed he heard a murmur of words, which at length attracted his attention. Athos went close to it, and distinguished some words which undoubtedly seemed to deserve so deep an interest that he beckoned to his friends to be silent, remaining himself bent, with his ear placed against the opening of the lower orifice.

"Listen, milady," said the cardinal; "the affair is important; sit down and let us talk."

"Milady!" murmured Athos.

"I am listening to your Eminence with the greatest attention," replied a woman's voice that made the musketeer start.

"A small vessel, with an English crew, whose captain is devoted to me, awaits you at the mouth of the Charente, at Fort de la Pointe. He will set sail to-morrow morning."

"I must go there to-night, then?"

"Instantly! That is to say, as soon as you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door on going out, will serve as your escort. You will let me leave first, and, half an hour after, you can go away in your turn."

"Yes, monseigneur. Now let us return to the mission in which you wish to employ me, and, as I desire to continue to

merit your Eminence's confidence, deign to explain it to me in clear and precise terms, so that I may not commit any error."

There was a moment of deep silence between the two speakers. It was evident the cardinal was weighing beforehand the terms in which he was about to speak, and that milady was collecting all the powers of her mind to understand the things he was about to say, and to engrave them in her memory when they were spoken.

Athos took advantage of this moment to tell his two companions to fasten the door on the inside, and to beckon to come and listen with him.

The two musketeers, who loved their ease, each brought a chair for himself and one for Athos. All three then sat down with their heads together and their ears alert.

"You will go to London," pursued the cardinal; "when you reach London you will seek out Buckingham."

"I must beg your Eminence to observe," said milady, "that since the affair of the diamond studs, about which the duke always suspected me, his Grace has been very mistrustful of me."

"Well, this time," said the cardinal, "it is not a question of worming yourself into his confidence, but you will present yourself frankly and loyally as a negotiator."

"Frankly and loyally," repeated milady, in an unspeakable tone of duplicity.

"Yes, frankly and loyally," replied the cardinal, in the same tone; "this whole negotiation is to be carried on openly."

"I will follow your Eminence's instructions to the letter. I only await your giving them."

"You will go to Buckingham in my behalf, and you will tell him I am acquainted with all the preparations he has made, but that they give me no uneasiness, since, at the first step he takes, I will ruin the queen."

"Will he believe that your Eminence is in a position to accomplish the threat you make him?"

"Yes, for I have the proofs."

"I must be able to present these proofs so as to convince him."

"Unquestionably; and you will tell him I will publish the report of Bois-Robert and of the Marquis de Beautru, regarding the interview with the queen which the duke had at the constable's residence, on the evening Madame la Connétable gave a masked ball. You will tell him, in order that he may not doubt anything, that he came there in the costume of the

Great Mogul, which the Chevalier de Guise was to have worn, and which he bought for three thousand pistoles."

"Very well, monseigneur."

"All the details of his entrance and departure on the night when he was introduced into the palace in the character of an Italian fortune-teller, you will tell him, in order that he may not doubt the correctness of my information: that he wore under his cloak a large white robe dotted with black tears, skulls, and cross-bones; for, in case of a surprise, he was to pass for the Phantom of the White Lady, who, as every one is aware, appears at the Louvre every time any great event is about to happen."

"Is that all, monseigneur?"

"Tell him also that I am acquainted with all the details of the adventure at Amiens; that I will have a little romance made of it, wittily turned, with a plan of the garden and portraits of the principal actors in that nocturnal romance."

"I will tell him that."

"Tell him, further, Montague is in my power; that Montague is in the Bastille; that no letters were found on him, it is true, but that torture may make him tell what he knows, and even — what he does not know."

"Exactly."

"Then add that his Grace in his precipitation to quit the Isle of Ré forgot and left behind him in his lodging a letter from Madame de Chevreuse, which singularly compromises the queen, inasmuch as it proves not only that her Majesty can love the king's enemies, but that she can conspire with the enemies of France. You recollect perfectly all I have told you, do you not?"

"Your Eminence will judge: Madame la Connétable's ball; the night at the Louvre; the evening at Amiens; the arrest of Montague; the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That's it," said the cardinal, "that's it; you have an excellent memory, milady."

"But," resumed the lady to whom the cardinal had just addressed this flattering compliment, "if, in spite of all these reasons, the duke does not yield, and continues to threaten France?"

"The duke is madly or rather insanely in love," replied Richelieu, with great bitterness. "Like the paladins of old, he has undertaken this war merely to obtain a look from his lady-love. If he becomes certain that this war will cost the honor, and perhaps the liberty, of the lady of his

thoughts. as he calls her, I will answer for it he will look at it twice."

"And yet," said milady, with a persistence that proved she wished to see clearly to the end of the mission with which she was about to be charged, "and yet, if he persists?"

"If he persists?" said the cardinal; "that is not probable."

"It is possible," said milady.

"If he persists —" His Eminence made a pause, and resumed: "If he persists — well, then I shall hope for one of those events which change the destinies of states."

"If your Eminence would quote to me some one of these events in history," said milady, "perhaps I should partake of your confidence in the future."

"Well here, then, for example," said Richelieu. "When in 1610, for a cause almost similar to the one that moves the duke, King Henry IV., of glorious memory, was about to invade Flanders and Italy at the same time in order to attack Austria on both sides — well, did there not happen an event which saved Austria? Why should not the king of France have the same chance as the emperor?"

"Your Eminence means the knife-stab of the Rue de la Ferronnerie?"

"Exactly so," said the cardinal.

"Does not your Eminence fear that the punishment inflicted on Ravallac may deter any one who might think of imitating him?"

"There will be, in all times and in all countries, particularly if religious divisions exist in those countries, fanatics who ask nothing better than to become martyrs. And, observe, it just occurs to me that the Puritans are furious against the Duke of Buckingham, and their preachers designate him as Antichrist."

"Well?" said milady.

"Well," continued the cardinal, in an indifferent tone, "the only difficulty at this moment is to find some woman, handsome, young, and clever, who wants to get revenge on the duke. Such a woman may be found. The duke has had many love-affairs, and if he has succeeded in many of his intrigues by his promises of eternal constancy, he must likewise have sown the seeds of many hatreds by his eternal infidelities."

"No doubt," said milady coolly, "such a woman may be found."

"Well, such a woman, who would put Jacques Clement's knife or Ravallac's in a fanatic's hands, would save France."

"Yes, but she would be implicated in an assassination."

"Were Ravailiac's accomplices or Jacques Clement's ever known?"

"No, for perhaps they were too high for any one to dare look for them where they were; the Palace of Justice would not be burnt down for every one, monseigneur."

"So you think the fire at the Palace of Justice was not caused by chance?" asked Richelieu, in a tone such as he would have used in putting a question of no importance.

"I, monseigneur?" replied milady; "I think nothing — I quote a fact, that is all; only I say that if my name were Mademoiselle de Montpensier or the Queen Marie de' Medici, I should take less precautions than I take, though I am simply called Lady Clarick."

"That is but just," said Richelieu; "what do you require, then?"

"I require an order which would ratify beforehand all that I should think proper to do for the greatest good of France."

"But, in the first place, we must find the woman I have described, who is anxious to avenge herself on the duke."

"She is found," said milady.

"Then we must find the miserable fanatic, who will serve as an instrument of God's justice."

"He will be found."

"Well," said the cardinal, "then it will be time to demand the order which you just now asked for."

"Your Eminence is right," replied milady; "and I have been wrong in seeing in the mission with which you honor me anything but what it really is — that is to say, to announce to his Grace, from your Eminence, that you are acquainted with the different disguises by means of which he succeeded in approaching the queen during the ball given at the constable's; that you have proofs of the interview granted at the Louvre by the queen to a certain Italian astrologer, who was no one else than the Duke of Buckingham; that you have ordered a little romance of a satirical nature to be written on the adventure of Amiens, with a plan of the gardens in which that adventure took place, and portraits of the actors who took part in it; that Montague is in the Bastille, and that torture may make him say things he remembers, and even things he has forgotten; finally, that you have in your possession a letter from Madame de Chevreuse, found in his Grace's headquarters, which singularly compromises not only her who wrote it, but also the lady in whose name it was written. Then, if he persists, in spite of all this, inasmuch as what I have just said is

the limit of my mission, I shall have nothing more to do but to pray God to work a miracle for the salvation of France. That is it, is it not, monseigneur, and I shall have nothing else to do ? ”

“ That is it,” replied the cardinal dryly.

“ And now,” said milady, without appearing to remark the change of the duke’s tone toward her, “ now that I have received your Eminence’s instructions regarding your enemies, will monseigneur permit me to say a few words to him of mine ? ”

“ Why, have you enemies ? ” asked Richelieu.

“ Yes, monseigneur, enemies against whom you owe me all your support, for I made them by serving your Eminence.”

“ Who are they ? ” replied the duke.

“ In the first place, there is a little intriguing woman named Bonacieux.”

“ She is in the prison of Nantes.”

“ That is to say, she was there,” replied milady ; “ but the queen obtained an order from the king by means of which she has been conveyed to a convent.”

“ To a convent ? ” exclaimed the duke.

“ Yes, to a convent.”

“ And what convent ? ”

“ I don’t know ; the secret has been well kept.”

“ But I will know ! ”

“ And will your Eminence tell me in what convent this woman is ? ”

“ I see nothing improper in that,” said the cardinal.

“ Well, now I have an enemy much more to be dreaded by me than this little Madame Bonacieux.”

“ Who is that ? ”

“ Her lover.”

“ What is his name ? ”

“ Oh, your Eminence knows him well,” cried milady, carried away by her anger. “ He is the evil genius of both of us : in an encounter with your Eminence’s guards, he decided the victory in favor of the king’s musketeers ; he gave three desperate wounds to De Wardes, your emissary, and he caused the affair of the diamond studs to fail ; and he, knowing I had Madame Bonacieux abducted, has sworn my death.”

“ Ah, ha ! ” said the cardinal ; “ I know whom you mean.”

“ I mean that wretch D’Artagnan.”

“ He is a bold fellow,” said the cardinal.

"And because he is a bold fellow he is the more to be feared."

"I must have," said the duke, "a proof of his connection with Buckingham."

"A proof!" cried milady; "I will find you ten."

"Well, then, it is the simplest thing in the world. Get me your proof, and I will send him to the Bastille."

"So far so good, monseigneur; but afterwards?"

"When one is in the Bastille, there is no afterwards!" said the cardinal in a low voice. "Ah, by God!" continued he, "if it were as easy for me to get rid of my enemy as it is easy to get rid of yours, and if it were only against such people you required impunity!"

"Monseigneur," replied milady, "a fair exchange — life for life, man for man; give me one, I will give you the other."

"I don't know what you mean, nor do I even wish to know what you mean," replied the cardinal; "but I wish to please you, and see nothing out of the way in giving you what you ask for with respect to so mean a creature; the more so as you tell me this petty D'Artagnan is a libertine, a duellist, a traitor."

"An infamous scoundrel, monseigneur, an infamous scoundrel!"

"Give me paper, a pen, and some ink, then," said the cardinal.

"Here they are, monseigneur."

There was a moment of silence, which proved that the cardinal was engaged in seeking the terms in which he should write the note, or else in writing it. Athos, who had not lost a word of the conversation, took his two companions by the hand and led them to the other end of the room.

"Well," said Porthos, "what do you want, and why do you not let us listen to the end of the conversation?"

"Hush!" said Athos, speaking in a low voice; "we have heard all it was necessary for us to hear; besides, I don't prevent you from listening, but I must be gone."

"You must be gone!" said Porthos; "and if the cardinal asks for you, what answer can we make?"

"You will not wait till he asks; you will speak first, and tell him that I am gone as a scout, because certain expressions of our landlord have made me think the road is not safe; I will say a word or two about it to the cardinal's attendant likewise; the rest concerns myself, don't be anxious about that."

"Be prudent, Athos," said Aramis.

"Don't be worried," replied Athos.

Porthos and Aramis resumed their places by the stove-pipe.

Athos went out without any mystery, took his horse, which was tied with those of his friends to the fastenings of the shutters, in four words convinced the attendant of the necessity of a vanguard for their return, carefully examined the priming of his pistol, drew his sword, and, like a forlorn hope, took the road to the camp.

CHAPTER XLV.

A CONJUGAL SCENE.

As Athos had foreseen, the cardinal soon came down; he opened the door of the room where the musketeers were, and found Porthos playing an earnest game at dice with Aramis. He cast a rapid glance round the room, and perceived that one of his men was missing.

"What has become of Monsieur Athos?" asked he.

"Monseigneur," replied Porthos, "he has gone on as a scout, owing to some expressions dropped by our landlord making him fear the road was not safe."

"And how have you been amusing yourself, M. Porthos?"

"I have won five pistoles from Aramis, monseigneur."

"Well, now will you return with me?"

"We are at your Eminence's orders."

"To horse, then, gentlemen; for it is getting late."

The attendant was at the door, holding the cardinal's horse by the bridle. A short distance away a group of two men and three horses appeared in the shade; these were the two men who were to conduct milady to the fort of la Pointe, and superintend her embarkation.

The attendant confirmed to the cardinal what the two musketeers had already said regarding Athos. The cardinal made an approving gesture, and started to return with the same precautions he had used in coming.

Let us leave him to follow the road to the camp, protected by his attendant and the two musketeers, and return to Athos.

For a hundred paces he maintained the gait with which he started, but when once out of sight, he turned his horse to the right, made a circuit, and came back to within twenty paces, where, shielded by a coppice, he might watch the passage of the little troop. Having recognized his companions' laced

hats and the golden fringe of the cardinal's cloak, he waited till the horsemen had turned the angle of the road, and having lost them from sight, he returned at a gallop to the tavern, which was opened to him without hesitation.

The landlord recognized him.

"My officer," said Athos, "has forgotten to give a piece of very important information to the lady, and has sent me back to repair his forgetfulness."

"Go up," said the host, "she is still in her room."

Athos availed himself of the permission, mounted the stairs with his lightest step, gained the landing, and through the open door saw milady putting on her hat.

He went straight into the chamber and closed the door behind him.

At the noise he made in bolting it, milady turned round.

Athos was standing before the door, enveloped in his cloak, with his hat pulled down over his eyes. On seeing that figure mute and motionless like a statue, milady was startled.

"Who are you? and what do you want?" cried she.

"There now!" murmured Athos; "it is certainly she!"

And dropping his cloak and raising his hat, he advanced toward milady.

"Do you know me, madame?" said he.

Milady took one step forward, and then grew pale, as though she saw a serpent.

"Come," said Athos. "Good! I see you know me."

"The Comte de la Fère!" murmured milady, drawing back till the wall prevented her going any farther.

"Yes, milady," replied Athos, "the Comte de la Fère in person, who comes expressly from the other world to have the pleasure of seeing you. Sit down, then, and let us talk, as the cardinal said."

Milady, under the influence of inexpressible terror, sat down without uttering a word.

"You are a demon sent to earth!" said Athos. "Your power is great, I know; but you also know that with God's aid men have often conquered the most terrible demons. You have once before crossed my path! I thought I had crushed you, madame; but either I was deceived, or hell has brought you to life again."

Milady, at these words, which recalled frightful remembrances, hung her head, with a suppressed groan.

"Yes, hell has brought you to life again," continued Athos, "hell has made you rich, hell has given you another name."

hell has almost made you another countenance; but it has effaced neither the stains from your soul nor the brand from your body!"

Milady started up as if moved by a spring, and her eyes flashed lightning. Athos remained sitting.

"You believed me to be dead, did you not, as I believed you to be? and the name of Athos as well concealed the Comte de la Fére as the name of Lady Clarick concealed Anne de Bueil! Were you not so called when your honored brother married us? Our position is truly strange," pursued Athos, laughing; "we have lived up to the present time only because we believed each other to be dead, and because a remembrance is less oppressive than a living creature, though sometimes a remembrance is a devouring thing!"

"But," said milady, in a hollow, faint voice, "what brings you back to me? and what do you want with me?"

"I wish to tell you that, though I have remained invisible to your eyes, I have not lost sight of you. I can tell you of your actions day by day from the time you entered the cardinal's service until this evening."

A smile of incredulity passed over milady's pale lips.

"Listen! You cut off the two diamond studs from the Duke of Buckingham's shoulder; you had Madame Bonacieux abducted; you were in love with De Wardes, and, thinking to pass the night with him, opened the door to M. d'Artagnan; you believed that De Wardes had deceived you, and tried to have him killed by his rival; when his rival had discovered your infamous secret, you tried to have him killed in his turn by two assassins, whom you sent in pursuit of him; finding the balls had missed their mark, you sent poisoned wine with a forged letter, to make your victim believe that the wine came from his friends; and lastly, you have just now been sitting in this chamber, in this very chair where I am now, and have entered into an engagement with Cardinal Richelieu to have the Duke of Buckingham assassinated, in exchange for the promise he made you to have D'Artagnan assassinated for your sake."

Milady was livid.

"You must be Satan!" cried she.

"Perhaps," said Athos. "But, at least, listen to what I say. Assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or have him assassinated, it makes no difference to me. I don't know him; besides, he is an Englishman. But do not touch with the tip of your finger a single hair of D'Artagnan, who is a faithful friend,

whom I love and defend, or I swear to you by my father's life the crime which you shall have committed shall be your last."

"M. d'Artagnan has cruelly insulted me," said milady, in a hollow voice; "M. d'Artagnan shall die!"

"Indeed! is it possible to insult you, madame?" said Athos, laughing; "he has insulted you, and he shall die!"

"He shall die!" replied milady; "she first, then he."

Athos was seized with a kind of vertigo. The sight of this creature, who had nothing womanly about her, recalled devouring remembrances. He recalled how one day, in a less dangerous situation than the one in which he was now placed, he had already tried to sacrifice her to his honor. His desire for her death returned, burning, and pervaded him like a raging fever. He arose, put his hand to his belt, drew out a pistol, and cocked it.

Milady, pale as a corpse, struggled to cry out; but her frozen tongue could utter only a hoarse sound, which had nothing human in it, and seemed a wild beast's rattle; clinging to the dark tapestry, she appeared, with her hair in disorder, like the frightful image of terror.

Athos slowly raised his pistol, stretched out his arm, so that the weapon almost touched milady's forehead, and then, in a voice the more terrible from having the supreme calmness of an inflexible resolution:

"Madame," said he, "you will this instant deliver to me the paper the cardinal signed; or, on my soul, I will blow your brains out."

With another man, milady might have preserved some doubt; but she knew Athos, yet she remained motionless.

"You have one second to decide," said he.

Milady saw by the contraction of his countenance that he was about to pull the trigger; she put her hand quickly into her bosom, pulled out a paper, and held it toward Athos.

"Take it," said she, "and be damned!"

Athos took the paper, returned the pistol to his belt, approached the lamp to be assured that it was the right paper, unfolded it, and read:

"By my order, and for the good of the State, the bearer hereof has done what he has done.

"August 5, 1628.

RICHELIEU."

"And now," said Athos, taking up his cloak again and putting on his hat, "now that I have drawn your teeth, viper, bite if you can."

And he left the chamber without once looking behind him.

At the door he found the two men, and the horse which they held.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you know monseigneur's order is, for you to conduct that woman, without losing time, to Fort de la Pointe, and not to leave her till she is on board."

As his words agreed exactly with the order they had received, they bowed in sign of assent.

Athos leaped lightly into his saddle, and set out at full gallop; only, instead of following the road, he took across the fields, urging his horse to the utmost, and stopping occasionally to listen.

In one of his halts, he heard the trampling of several horses on the road. He had no doubt it was the cardinal and his escort. He immediately galloped on ahead, rubbed his horse down with some heather and leaves of trees, and then placed himself in the middle of the road, about two hundred paces from the camp.

"Who goes there?" cried he, as soon as he saw the horsemen coming.

"That is our brave musketeer, I think," said the cardinal.

"Yes, monseigneur," said Porthos, "it is he."

"Monsieur Athos," said Richelieu, "receive my thanks for the good guard you have kept. Gentlemen, we are here; take the gate on the left; the watchword is 'King and Ré.'"

On saying these words, the cardinal bent his head in salutation of the three friends, and took the right hand, followed by his attendant; for, that night, he himself was to sleep in camp.

"Well," said Porthos and Aramis together, as soon as the cardinal was out of hearing, "well, he signed the paper she asked for!"

"I know he did," said Athos, "and here it is."

And the three friends did not exchange another word till they got to their quarters, except to give the watchword to the sentinels.

But they sent Mousqueton to tell Planchet that his master was requested to come to the quarters of the musketeers the instant he left the trenches.

Milady, as Athos had foreseen, on finding the two men awaiting her, made no objection to going with them. She had indeed for an instant felt an inclination to be taken back to the cardinal and relate everything to him; but a revelation on her own account would bring about a revelation from Athos;

she might say that Athos had hanged her, but then Athos would tell that she was branded. She thought it was, therefore, best to preserve silence, to set off discreetly, to accomplish her difficult mission with her usual skill, and then, all things being performed to the cardinal's satisfaction, to come back and claim her vengeance.

Consequently, after travelling all night, she was at seven o'clock at Fort de la Pointe. At eight o'clock she had embarked; and at nine the vessel, which, with letters of marque from the cardinal, was supposed to be going to Bayonne, raised anchor and set sail toward England.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BASTION SAINT-GERVAIS.

ON rejoining his three friends, D'Artagnan found them assembled in the same room. Athos was meditating, Porthos was twirling his moustaches, Aramis was reading prayers in a charming little Book of Hours, bound in blue velvet.

"By Jove!" said he, "gentlemen, I hope what you have to tell me is worth the trouble; or else, I warn you, I will not pardon you for making me come here instead of getting a little rest, after a night spent in taking and dismantling a bastion. Ah! why were you not there, gentlemen? It was warm work."

"We were in a place where it was not very cold!" replied Porthos, giving his moustache a twirl that was peculiar to him.

"Hush!" said Athos.

"Oh! ho!" said D'Artagnan, comprehending the musketeer's slight frown; "it appears there is something new on hand."

"Aramis," said Athos, "you went to breakfast day before yesterday at the tavern of the Infidel,¹ I believe?"

"Yes."

"How did you fare?"

"For my part, I ate but little; day before yesterday was a fast-day, and they had nothing but meat."

¹ "Le Parpaillot": parpaillot was an opprobrious term applied to Calvinists; it is derived either from *papillon*, a butterfly, or from *parpillote*, a small piece of money used by the religious partisans of the 16th century; or from the Sieur Parpaille, a native of Orange, who, after propagating Protestantism in the Comtat, was put to death in 1562. The word came to mean, in familiar language, a man who had no religion.

"What!" said Athos; "no fish at a seaport?"

"They say," said Aramis, resuming his pious reading, "that the dyke which the cardinal is making drives them all out into the open sea."

"But that is not quite what I asked you," replied Athos; "I want to know if you were left alone, and nobody interrupted you."

"Why, I think there were not many intruders; yes, Athos, I know what you mean; we shall do very well at the Infidel."

"Let us go to the Infidel, then; for here the walls are like sheets of paper."

D'Artagnan, who was accustomed to his friend's manner of acting, and perceived immediately by a word, a gesture, or a sign from him that the circumstances were serious, took Athos's arm, and went out with him without saying anything; Porthos followed, chatting with Aramis.

On their way they fell in with Grimaud; Athos beckoned him to come with them; Grimaud, as usual, silently obeyed; the poor lad had nearly come to the pass of forgetting how to speak.

They arrived at the tap-room of the Infidel; it was seven o'clock in the morning, and daylight began to appear; the three friends ordered breakfast, and went into a room in which, the host said, they were not likely to be disturbed.

Unfortunately, the hour was badly chosen for a private conference; reveille had just been beaten; every one was shaking off the drowsiness of night, and, to dispel the humid morning air, came to take a drop at the bar: dragoons, Swiss, guardsmen, musketeers, light-horsemen, succeeded one another with a rapidity which might answer the landlord's purposes very well, but agreed badly with the views of the four friends. Thus they replied very curtly to the salutations, healths, and jokes of their companions.

"Come," said Athos; "we shall get into some pretty quarrel or other, and we don't need one just now. D'Artagnan, tell us what sort of a night you had, and we will describe ours afterwards."

"Ah! yes," said a light-horseman, lolling about with a glass of brandy in his hand which he was leisurely sipping, "ah! yes! You gentlemen of the guards were in the trenches last night, and you had a bone to pick with the Rochellais."

D'Artagnan looked at Athos to know if he ought to reply to this intruder, who mixed unasked in their conversation.

"Well," said Athos, "don't you hear M. de Busigny, who

does you the honor of asking you a question? Relate what has passed during the night, since these gentlemen wish to know."

"Did you not take a bastion?" asked a Swiss, who was drinking rum out of a beer-glass.

"Yes, sir," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "we had that honor; as you may have heard, we even put a barrel of powder under one of the angles, which, when it blew up, made a very pretty breach; without reckoning that, as the bastion was not built yesterday, all the rest of the building was much shaken."

"And which bastion was it?" asked a dragoon, with his sabre run through a goose, which he was taking to have cooked.

"The bastion Saint-Gervais," replied D'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochellais have been annoying our workmen."

"Was the affair hot?"

"Yes, moderately so; we lost five men, and the Rochellais eight or ten."

"Balzempleu!" said the Swiss, who, notwithstanding the admirable stock of oaths possessed by the German language, had acquired the habit of swearing in French.

"But," said the light-horseman, "probably they will send pioneers this morning to repair the bastion."

"Yes, probably," said D'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "I have a wager to propose."

"Ah! ha! a wager!" cried the Swiss.

"What is it?" said the light-horseman.

"Stop a bit," said the dragoon, placing his sabre like a spit upon the two large iron dogs which held the fire-brands on the hearth, "stop a bit; I am in it. You dog of a landlord! a dripping-pan instantly, that I may not lose a drop of the fat of this estimable bird."

"You are quite right," said the Swiss; "koose-krease is koot vith bastry."

"There!" said the dragoon. "Now for the wager. We are all attention, M. Athos."

"Ah! now for the wager!" said the light-horseman.

"Well, Monsieur de Busigny, I will bet you," said Athos, "that my three companions, MM. Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, and myself, will go and breakfast in the bastion Saint-Gervais, and will remain there an hour, by the watch, whatever the enemy may do to dislodge us."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other; they began to understand.

"Well, but," said D'Artagnan, in Athos's ear, "you are going to get us all killed without mercy."

"We are much more likely to be killed," said Athos, "if we do not go."

"'Pon my word! gentlemen," said Porthos, turning round upon his chair and twirling his moustache, "that's a fine bet, I hope."

"I take it," said M. de Busigny; "now let us fix the stake."

"Why, you are four, gentlemen," said Athos, "and we are four; a dinner for eight — will that do?"

"Capitally," replied M. de Busigny.

"Perfectly well," said the dragoon.

"Dat suits me," said the Swiss.

The fourth auditor, who during all this conversation *had* played a mute part, nodded to show that he acquiesced in the proposition.

"The breakfast for these gentlemen is ready," said the landlord.

"Well, bring it in," said Athos.

The landlord obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, pointed to a large basket standing in a corner, and made a sign to him to wrap the food up in the napkins.

Grimaud perceived that it was to be a breakfast on the grass, packed the viands into the basket, added the bottles, and then took the basket on his arm.

"But where are you going to eat my breakfast?" said the landlord.

"Of what consequence is that to you, if you are paid for it?" said Athos, and he threw two pistoles majestically on the table.

"Shall I give you the change, officer?" said the host.

"No, only add two bottles of champagne, and the difference will be for the napkins."

The landlord had not quite so good a bargain as he at first hoped for, but he made up for it by slipping in two bottles of Anjou wine instead of two bottles of champagne.

"Monsieur de Busigny," said Athos, "will you be so kind as to set your watch with mine, or permit me to regulate mine by yours?"

"Certainly, sir," said the light-horseman, drawing from his fob a very handsome watch set in diamonds; "half-past seven," said he.

"Thirty-five minutes after seven," said Athos; "we shall know that I am five minutes faster than you, sir."

And bowing to all the astonished spectators, the young men

started off for the bastion Saint-Gervais, followed by Grimaud carrying the basket, ignorant of where he was going, but, in the passive obedience which Athos had taught him, not even thinking of asking.

As long as they were within the camp, the four friends did not exchange a word; besides, they were followed by inquisitive loungers, who, hearing of the wager, were anxious to know how they would succeed. But when once they had passed the line of circunvallation, and found themselves in the open field, D'Artagnan, who was completely ignorant of what was going on, thought it was time to demand an explanation.

"And now, my dear Athos," said he, "do me the kindness to tell me where we are going?"

"Why, you see, plainly enough, we are going to the bastion."

"But what are we going to do there?"

"Why, you know well enough we are going to breakfast there."

"But why did we not breakfast at the Infidel?"

"Because we have some very important things to talk over, and it was impossible to talk five minutes in that tavern without being annoyed by all those importunate fellows, who keep coming in, saluting you, and addressing you; yonder, at least," said Athos, pointing to the bastion, "they will not come and disturb us."

"It seems to me," said D'Artagnan, with that prudence which was so naturally allied with his extreme bravery, "it seems to me that we could have found some retired place on the downs or by the seashore."

"Where we should have been seen all four conferring together, so that at the end of a quarter of an hour the cardinal would have been informed by his spies that we were holding a council."

"Yes," said Aramis, "Athos is right: *Animadvertuntur in desertis.*"

"A desert would not have been amiss," said Porthos, "but the question was where to find it."

"There is no desert where a bird cannot fly over one's head, where a fish cannot leap out of the water, where a rabbit cannot come out of its burrow, and I believe that bird, fish, and rabbit would all be the cardinal's spies. Better, then, carry out our undertaking, from which, besides, we cannot retreat without shame. We have made a wager, a wager which could not be foreseen, and of which I defy any one to guess the true

cause. In order to win it, we are going to stay an hour in the bastion. We shall either be attacked, or we shall not be. If we are not, we shall have all the time to talk, and nobody will hear us, for I will answer for it the walls of the bastion have no ears. If we are attacked, we will talk of our affairs just the same, and while defending ourselves we shall cover ourselves with glory. You see that everything is to our advantage."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "but undoubtedly we shall receive a bullet."

"Well, my dear," replied Athos, "you know well that the bullets most to be dreaded are not from open enemies."

"But, for such an expedition, we surely ought to have brought our muskets."

"You are stupid, friend Porthos; why load ourselves with a useless burden?"

"I think a good musket, a dozen cartridges, and a powder-flask are not very useless things in face of an enemy."

"Well," replied Athos, "didn't you hear what D'Artagnan said?"

"What did D'Artagnan say?"

"D'Artagnan said that in the attack last night, eight or ten Frenchmen were killed and as many Rochellais."

"What then?"

"They did not have time to plunder the bodies, did they?—seeing that for the moment they had something more urgent to do."

"Well?"

"Well, we shall find their muskets, their cartridges, and their powder-flasks, and instead of four musketoons and a dozen balls, we shall have fifteen guns and a hundred charges to fire."

"Oh! Athos," said Aramis, "truly thou art a great man."

Porthos bowed in sign of acquiescence. D'Artagnan alone did not appear to be quite satisfied.

Grimaud, no doubt, shared the young man's misgivings, for, seeing that they continued to advance toward the bastion, a thing which he had not at first suspected, he pulled his master by the skirt of his coat.

"Where are we going?" asked he by a gesture.

Athos pointed to the bastion.

"But," said the silent Grimaud, still in the same dialect, "we shall leave our hides there."

Athos raised his eyes and his finger toward heaven.

Grimaud put his basket on the ground and sat down, shaking his head.

Athos took a pistol from his belt, looked to see if it was properly primed, cocked it, and placed the muzzle close to Grimaud's ear.

Grimaud was on his legs again, as if moved by a spring. Athos then made him a sign to take up his basket, and to walk on first. Grimaud obeyed. All that Grimaud gained by this moment's pantomime was that he was promoted from the rear-guard to the van-guard.

When they reached the bastion, the four friends turned round.

More than three hundred soldiers of all kinds were assembled at the gate of the camp; and in a separate group they could distinguish M. de Busigny, the dragoon, the Swiss, and the fourth wagger.

Athos took off his hat, put it on the end of his sword, and waved it in the air. All the spectators returned him his salute, accompanying this politeness with a loud hurrah, which they plainly heard. After which they all four disappeared in the bastion, where Grimaud had already preceded them.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE COUNCIL OF THE MUSKETEERS.

As Athos had foreseen, the bastion was occupied only by a dozen dead bodies, French and Rochellais.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, who had assumed the command of the expedition, "while Grimaud is laying out the breakfast, let us begin by getting together the guns and cartridges; we can talk while performing that task. These gentlemen," added he, pointing to the bodies, "will not hear us."

"But still we might throw them into the ditch," said Porthos, "after assuring ourselves they have nothing in their pockets."

"Yes," said Athos, "that's Grimaud's business."

"Well, then," cried D'Artagnan, "let Grimaud search them, and throw them over the walls."

"By no means," said Athos; "they may be useful to us."

"These dead bodies useful to us?" exclaimed Porthos.

"Why, you are crazy, my dear friend."

"'Judge not rashly,' say the Gospels and the cardinal," replied Athos; "how many guns, gentlemen?"

"Twelve," replied Aramis.

"How many cartridges?"

"A hundred."

"That's quite as many as we shall want; let us load the guns."

The four musketeers went to work. As they were loading the last musket, Grimaud signified that breakfast was ready.

Athos replied, still by gestures, that it was all right, and showed Grimaud a kind of pepper-box, making him understand that he was to stand as sentinel. Only, to alleviate the tedium of the duty, Athos allowed him to take a loaf, two cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

"And now, to table," said Athos.

The four friends sat down on the ground, with their legs crossed, like Turks or tailors.

"There now," said D'Artagnan, "as there is no longer any fear of being overheard, I hope you are going to let us into your secret."

"I hope, at the same time, to provide you with amusement and glory, gentlemen," said Athos. "I have taken you on a very pleasant walk; here is a most delicious breakfast; and five hundred people yonder, as you may see through the loopholes, are taking us for heroes or madmen, two classes of imbeciles sufficiently alike."

"But the secret!" said D'Artagnan.

"The secret is," said Athos, "that I saw milady last night."

D'Artagnan was lifting a glass to his lips, but at the mention of milady, his hand shook so that he put the glass on the ground again, for fear of spilling the contents.

"You saw your wi —"

"Hush!" interrupted Athos; "you forget, my dear, that these gentlemen have not been initiated, as you have, into the secrets of my family affairs. I saw milady."

"And where?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"About two leagues from here, at the tavern of the Red Dovecote."

"In that case I am lost," said D'Artagnan.

"No, not quite so yet," replied Athos; "for by this time she must have left the shores of France."

"But, after all," asked Porthos, "who is milady?"

"A very charming woman!" said Athos, sipping a glass of sparkling wine. "That rascally landlord!" cried he; "he has

given us Anjou wine instead of Champagne, and fancies we know no better! Yes," continued he, "a very charming woman, who bestowed her favors on our friend D'Artagnan, while he, on his part, has given her some offence for which she tried to pay him off, a month ago, by having him killed by two musket-shots; a week ago by attempting to poison him; and yesterday by demanding his head of the cardinal."

"What! by demanding my head of the cardinal?" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes, that is as true as the Gospel," said Porthos; "I heard her with my own ears."

"So did I," said Aramis.

"But I can never escape," said D'Artagnan, "with such enemies. First, there is my unknown man of Meung; then De Wardes, on whom I have inflicted three wounds; next milady, whose secret I have discovered; and last the cardinal, whose vengeance I have balked."

"Well," said Athos, "that only makes four; and we are four—one for one. By Jove! if we may believe the signs Grimaud is making, we are about to have to do with a much greater number of people."

"What's the matter, Grimaud?" said Athos. "Considering the seriousness of the case, I permit you to speak, my friend; but be brief, I beg of you. What do you see?"

"A troop."

"How many persons?"

"Twenty men."

"What sort of men?"

"Sixteen pioneers, four soldiers."

"How far distant?"

"Five hundred paces."

"Good! We have just time to finish this fowl, and to drink one glass of wine to your health, D'Artagnan!"

"To your health," repeated Porthos and Aramis.

"Well, then, to my health! though I do not believe that your good wishes will be of much service to me."

"Bah!" said Athos; "'God is great,' as the followers of Mahomet say; and the future is in His hands."

Then, swallowing the contents of his glass, which he put down close to him, Athos arose carelessly, took the nearest musket, and went to one of the loop-holes.

Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan did the same. Grimaud was ordered to place himself behind the four friends, in order to reload their guns.

In a moment the troop appeared ; they were advancing along a sort of branch trench, which gave communication between the bastion and the city.

"By Jove!" said Athos, "it was hardly worth while to disturb ourselves for twenty fellows armed with pickaxes, mattocks, and shovels! Grimaud needed only make them a sign to go away, and I am sure they would have left us alone."

"I doubt that," replied D'Artagnan; "for they are advancing very resolutely. Besides, in addition to the pioneers, there are four soldiers and a corporal armed with muskets."

"That's because they didn't see us," said Athos.

"Faith!" said Aramis, "I vow it goes against my grain to fire on these poor devils of bourgeois."

"He is a bad priest," said Porthos, "who pities heretics."

"In truth," said Athos, "Aramis is right—I will warn them."

"What the devil are you going about?" cried D'Artagnan; "you will be shot, my dear!"

But Athos took no heed of his advice; and, mounting on the breach, with his musket in one hand and his hat in the other:

"Gentlemen," said he, bowing courteously, and addressing the soldiers and the pioneers, who, astonished to see him, stopped at fifty paces from the bastion, "gentlemen, a few friends and myself are engaged at breakfast in this bastion. Now, you know nothing is more disagreeable than being disturbed when one is at breakfast. We request you, then, if you really have business here, to wait till we have finished our repast, or to come later on; unless you are wisely desirous of deserting the rebels, and will come and drink with us to the health of the king of France."

"Take care, Athos!" cried D'Artagnan; "don't you see they are aiming at you?"

"Yes, yes," said Athos, "but they are only bourgeois—very bad marksmen; they will be sure to miss me."

In fact, at the same instant four shots were fired, and the bullets flattened against the wall round Athos, but not one hit him. Four shots replied to them, almost instantaneously, but much better aimed than those of the aggressors. Three soldiers fell dead, and one of the pioneers was wounded.

"Grimaud," said Athos, still on the breach, "another musket!"

Grimaud instantly obeyed. The three friends had reloaded their arms; another discharge followed the second; the cor

poral and two pioneers fell dead; the rest of the troop took to flight.

"Now, gentlemen, for a sortie!" cried Athos.

And the four friends rushed out of the fort, gained the field of battle, picked up the muskets of the four soldiers, and the corporal's half-pike; and, convinced that the fugitives would not stop till they got to the city, turned again toward the bastion, bearing with them the trophies of their victory.

"Reload the muskets, Grimaud," said Athos, "and we, gentlemen, will go on with our breakfast and resume our conversation. Where were we?"

"I remember," said D'Artagnan; "you were saying that after demanding my head of the cardinal, milady left the shores of France. Where is she going?" added he, considerably interested in the itinerary which milady was following.

"She is going to England," said Athos.

"What for?"

"To assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or cause him to be assassinated."

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and indignation.

"But this is infamous!" cried he.

"I beg you to believe," said Athos, "that I care very little about that. Now you have done, Grimaud, take our corporal's half-pike, tie a napkin to it, and plant it at the top of our bastion, that these rebels of Rochellais may see that they have to deal with brave and loyal soldiers of the king."

Grimaud obeyed without replying.

An instant afterwards the white flag was floating over the heads of the four friends; a thunder of applause saluted its appearance; half the camp was at the barrier.

"But why do you care so little whether she kill Buckingham or not? The duke is our friend."

"The duke is an Englishman, the duke is fighting against us; let her do what she likes with the duke; I care no more for him than for an empty bottle."

"One moment!" said D'Artagnan; "I will not give up Buckingham in this way; he gave us some very fine horses."

"And, above all, some very handsome saddles," said Porthos, who at that very moment was wearing the lace of his on his cloak.

"Besides," said Aramis, "God desires the conversion, and not the death, of a sinner."

"Amen!" said Athos; "and we will return to that subject."

later, if such be your pleasure; but what I was most anxious about at the moment — and I am sure you will understand me, D'Artagnan — was to secure from this woman a kind of *carte-blanche*, which she had extorted from the cardinal, and by means of which she could with impunity get rid of you and perhaps of us."

"But this creature must be a demon!" said Porthos, holding out his plate to Aramis, who was carving a fowl.

"And this *carte-blanche*," asked D'Artagnan, "this *carte-blanche* — has she it still?"

"No, I got it; I will not say without trouble, for if I did I should tell a lie."

"My dear Athos, I shall give up counting the number of times you have saved my life."

"So you left us to go to her!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Exactly so."

"And you have that letter of the cardinal's?"

"Here it is," said Athos.

And he took the precious paper from his coat pocket.

D'Artagnan unfolded it with a hand the trembling of which he did not even attempt to conceal, and read:

"By my order and for the good of the State, the bearer hereof has done what he has done.

"August 5, 1628.

RICHELIEU."

"In fact," said Aramis, "it is an absolution in all its forms."

"That paper must be torn in pieces," said D'Artagnan, who fancied he read in it his death sentence.

"On the contrary," said Athos, "it must be preserved carefully; I would not give this paper for as many gold pieces as would cover it."

"And what is she going to do now?" asked the young man.

"Well," replied Athos carelessly, "she is probably going to write to the cardinal that a damned musketeer, named Athos, has taken her safe conduct from her by force. She will advise him, in the same letter, to get rid of his two friends, Aramis and Porthos, at the same time he disposes of him. The cardinal will remember that these are the same men who are always crossing his path. Then, some fine morning, he will have D'Artagnan arrested, and for fear he should feel bored in his loneliness, he will have us sent to keep him company in the Bastille."

"There, now! It seems to me you are making but very dull jokes, my dear," said Porthos.

"I am not joking," said Athos.

"Do you know," said Porthos, "that to twist that damned milady's neck would be less of a sin than to twist the necks of these poor Huguenot devils, who have committed no other crimes than singing in French the Psalms that we sing in Latin?"

"What says the abbé?" asked Athos quietly.

"I say I am entirely of Porthos's opinion," replied Aramis.

"And I too," said D'Artagnan.

"Fortunately, she is a good way off," said Porthos, "for I confess she would make me very uncomfortable if she were here."

"She makes me uncomfortable in England as well as in France," said Athos.

"She makes me uncomfortable wherever she is," said D'Artagnan.

"But when you had her in your power, why did you not drown her, or strangle her, or hang her?" said Porthos; "it is only the dead who don't come back again."

"You think so, do you, Porthos?" replied the musketeer, with a sad smile, which D'Artagnan alone understood.

"I have an idea," said D'Artagnan.

"What is it?" cried the musketeers.

"To arms!" shouted Grimaud.

The young men sprang up and seized their muskets.

This time a small troop advanced, consisting of from twenty to twenty-five men; but this time they were not pioneers, but soldiers of the garrison.

"Shall we return to the camp?" suggested Porthos; "I don't think the sides are equal."

"Impossible, for three reasons," replied Athos; "the first is, that we have not finished breakfast; the second is, that we have still some very important things to talk about; and the third is, that it yet lacks ten minutes before the hour will be over."

"Well, then," said Aramis, "we must form a plan of battle."

"It's very simple," replied Athos; "as soon as the enemy are within range, we must fire on them; if they continue to advance, we must fire again; we must fire as long as we have loaded guns; then if the rest of the troop persist in mounting to the assault, we will allow the besiegers to reach the ditch, and then we will push down on their heads that strip of wall which seems to stand only by a miracle of equilibrium."

"Bravo!" cried Porthos; "decidedly, Athos, you were born

to be a general, and the cardinal, who fancies himself a great captain, is nothing to you."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "no divided attention, I beg; let each one pick out his man."

"I cover mine," said D'Artagnan.

"And I mine," said Porthos.

"And I *idem*," said Aramis.

"Fire, then!" said Athos.

The four muskets made but one report, but four men fell.

The drum immediately beat, and the little troop advanced double quick.

Then the musket-shots were repeated, without regularity, but always aimed with the same correctness. Nevertheless, as if they had been aware of the numerical weakness of the friends, the Rochellais continued to advance on the run.

At every three shots at least two men fell; but the approach of those who remained was not slackened.

On reaching the foot of the bastion, there was still more than a dozen or fifteen of the enemy. A last discharge welcomed them, but did not stop them. They leaped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

"Now, my friends," said Athos, "finish them at a blow; to the wall! to the wall!"

And the four friends, aided by Grimaud, pushed with the barrels of their muskets an enormous side of the wall, which bent over as if swayed by the wind, and, giving way from its base, fell with a horrible crash into the ditch. Then a fearful cry was heard, a cloud of dust mounted toward the sky, — and all was over!

"Can we have destroyed them all, from the first to the last?" said Athos.

"Faith, it seems so," said D'Artagnan.

"No," cried Porthos; "there go three or four, limping away."

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate men, covered with dirt and blood, were escaping along the hollow way, and were making for the city. These were all that were left of the little troop.

Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have been here an hour, and our wager is won; but we will be fair players. Besides, D'Artagnan has not told us his idea yet."

And the musketeer, with his usual coolness, went and sat down again before the remains of the breakfast.

"My idea?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes; you said you had an idea," said Athos.

"Oh! I remember now," said D'Artagnan. "Well, I will go to England again; I will go and find Buckingham."

"You shall not do that, D'Artagnan," said Athos coolly.

"And why not? Have I not been there once?"

"Yes; but at that period we were not at war; at that period Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy. What you now contemplate doing would amount to treason."

D'Artagnan perceived the force of this reasoning, and was silent.

"But," said Porthos, "I think I have an idea in my turn."

"Silence for M. Porthos's idea!" said Aramis.

"I will ask leave of absence of M. de Tréville, on some pretext or other, which you must find out, as I am not very clever at pretexts. Milady does not know me; I will get access to her without her suspecting who I am, and when I catch my beauty, I will strangle her."

"Well," replied Athos, "I am not far from approving M. Porthos's idea."

"For shame!" said Aramis; "kill a woman! No, listen to me; I have a genuine idea."

"Let us have your idea, Aramis," said Athos, who entertained great deference for the young musketeer.

"We must inform the queen."

"Ah, 'pon my word! yes," said Porthos and D'Artagnan at the same time; "I think we are getting at the proper means."

"Inform the queen!" said Athos; "and how? Have we any friends at court? Can we send any one to Paris without it being known in the camp? It is a hundred and forty leagues from here to Paris; before our letter reached Angers we should be in a dungeon."

"As to sending a letter safely to her Majesty," said Aramis, "I will take that on myself. I know a clever person at Tours —"

Aramis stopped on seeing Athos smile.

"Well, do you not adopt this means, Athos?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I do not reject it altogether," said Athos; "but I wish to remind Aramis that he cannot quit the camp, and that no one but one of us can be trusted; that two hours after the messenger has set out, all the capuchins, all the alguazils, all the black caps of the cardinal, will know your letter by heart, and you and your clever person will be arrested."

"Without reckoning that the queen would save Buckingham, but would take no heed of us at all."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "what Porthos says is full of sense."

"Ah! ha! but what's going on in the city?" exclaimed Athos.

"They are beating the alarm."

The four friends listened, and all heard distinctly the sound of the drum.

"You will see they are going to send a whole regiment against us," said Athos.

"You don't think of holding out against a whole regiment, do you?" inquired Porthos.

"Why not?" said the musketeer. "I feel myself quite in a humor for it; and I would hold out before an army if we had only taken the precaution to bring a dozen more bottles of wine."

"Pon my word, the drum is approaching," said D'Artagnan.

"Let it come," said Athos. "It is a quarter of an hour's journey from here to the city, consequently a quarter of an hour's journey from the city here. That is more time than we need to devise a plan. If we go from this place, we shall never find another so suitable. Ah! stop! I have it, gentlemen, — the right idea has just occurred to me."

"Tell us then."

"Allow me to give Grimaud some indispensable orders."

Athos made a sign for his lackey to draw near.

"Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the bodies which lay in the bastion, "take those gentlemen, set them up against the wall, put their hats on their heads, and their guns in their hands."

"Oh, great man!" cried D'Artagnan; "I understand now."

"You understand?" said Porthos.

"And do you understand, Grimaud?" said Aramis.

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative.

"That's all that's necessary," said Athos; "now for my idea."

"I should like, however, to understand," said Porthos.

"It is not necessary."

"Yes! yes! Athos's idea!" cried Aramis and D'Artagnan at the same time.

"This milady — this woman — this creature — this demon — as a brother-in-law, as I think you have told me, D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, I know him very well; and I also believe that he has not a very warm affection for his sister-in-law."

"There is no harm in that; if he detested her, it would be all the better," replied Athos.

"In that case, we are as well off as we could wish."

"And now," said Porthos, "I should like to understand what Grimaud is up to."

"Silence, Porthos!" said Aramis.

"What is her brother-in-law's name?"

"Lord Winter."

"Where is he now?"

"He returned to London at the first rumor of war."

"Well, he's just the man we want," said Athos; "we must warn him. We will send him word that his sister-in-law is on the point of assassinating some one, and we will beg of him not to lose sight of her. There is in London, I hope, some establishment like that of the Magdalens, or of the Repentant Women. He will place his sister in one of these, and we are in peace."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "until she gets out again."

"Ah, 'pon my word!" said Athos, "you require too much, D'Artagnan; I have given you all I had, and I beg leave to tell you that this is the end of my rope."

"But I think it would be still better," said Aramis, "to inform the queen and Lord Winter at the same time."

"Yes; but who is to carry the letter to Tours, and who the letter to London?"

"I answer for Bazin," said Aramis.

"And I for Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"That is so," said Porthos; "if we cannot leave the camp, our lackeys may."

"To be sure they may," said Aramis, "and this very day we write the letters, we give them money, and they set out."

"We will give them money?" replied Athos. "Have you any money then?"

The four friends looked at one another, and a cloud came over the brows which had been for an instant so cheerful.

"Quick!" cried D'Artagnan; "I see black points and red points moving yonder. What did you say about a regiment, Athos? It is a whole army!"

"'Pon my word," said Athos; "yes, there they are. Do you see the sneaks coming without drums or trumpets. Ah! have you finished, Grimaud?"

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative, and pointed to a

dozen bodies which he had set up in the most picturesque attitudes; some carrying arms, others seeming to aim, and the rest sword in hand.

"Bravo!" said Athos; "that does honor to your imagination."

"Very good," said Porthos; "I should like, however, to understand."

"Let us get away first," said D'Artagnan; "and you can understand afterwards."

"One moment, gentlemen, one moment; give Grimaud time to clear away the things."

"Ah, ha!" said Aramis; "the black points and the red points are visibly growing larger; I agree with D'Artagnan—I believe we have no time to lose to regain our camp."

"Faith!" said Athos, "I have nothing more to say against a retreat; our wager called for an hour; we have stayed an hour and a half. Nothing can be said; let us be off, gentlemen, let us be off!"

Grimaud had already gone on with the basket and the desert. The four friends followed, and had gone about ten paces.

"Ah!" cried Athos. "What the devil shall we do now, gentlemen?"

"Have you forgotten something," said Aramis.

"The flag! 's death! We must not leave a flag in the enemy's hands, even though that flag be but a napkin."

And Athos ran back to the bastion, mounted the platform, and brought off the flag; but as the Rochellais had come within musket range, they opened a terrible fire on this man, who appeared to be exposing himself for the pleasure of it.

But Athos might be said to bear a charmed life; the balls whistled all around him; not one hit him. He waved his flag, turning his back to the guards of the city and saluting those of the camp. On both sides loud shouts arose—on the one side cries of anger, on the other shouts of enthusiasm.

A second discharge followed the first, and three balls, by passing through it, made the napkin really a flag. Shouts were heard from the camp: "Come down! come down!"

Athos came down; his friends were anxiously waiting for him.

"Come on, Athos, come on!" cried D'Artagnan; "now we have found everything except money, it would be stupid to be killed."

But Athos continued to march majestically, in spite of all

the remarks his companions made to him; and they, finding their remarks idle, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket had got far in advance, and both were out of reach of the balls.

An instant later a furious firing was heard.

"What's that?" asked Porthos; "what are they firing at now? I hear no balls, and I see no one!"

"They are firing on our dead men," replied Athos.

"But our dead men will not return their fire."

"You are right; then they will fancy it is an ambuscade, they will deliberate, and by the time they find out the joke we shall be out of range. That's why it is useless to get a pleurisy by going too fast."

"Oh, I understand now," said the astonished Porthos.

"That's very lucky," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

The French, seeing the four friends returning leisurely, uttered shouts of enthusiasm.

At length a fresh discharge was heard, and this time the balls came rattling among the stones around the four friends, and whistling sharply in their ears. The Rochellais had just taken possession of the bastion.

"What bunglers!" said Athos; "how many have we killed of them — a dozen?"

"Or fifteen?"

"How many did we crush under the wall?"

"Eight or ten."

"And in exchange for all that, not a scratch! Ah! but what is the matter with your hand, D'Artagnan? It seems to me it is bleeding."

"Oh, it's nothing," said D'Artagnan.

"A spent ball?"

"Not even that."

"What is it, then?"

We have said that Athos loved D'Artagnan as though he was his son, and this sombre and inflexible character sometimes felt a parent's anxiety for the young man.

"Only grazed a little," replied D'Artagnan; "my fingers were caught between the stone of the wall and the stone of my ring, and the skin was broken."

"That comes of wearing diamonds, my master," said Athos disdainfully.

"Ah, to be sure," cried Porthos; "there is really a diamond; why the devil, then, do we plague ourselves about money, when there is a diamond?"

"Come, that's a fact!" said Aramis.

"Well thought of, Porthos; this time you have an idea."

"Certainly I have," said Porthos, drawing himself up proudly at Athos's compliment; "since there is a diamond, let us sell it."

"But," said D'Artagnan, "it is the queen's diamond."

"All the more reason why it should be sold," replied Athos; "as the queen is saving Buckingham, her lover, nothing could be more just; the queen is saving us, her friends, nothing more moral; let us sell the diamond. What says Monsieur l'Abbé? I don't ask Porthos: his opinion has been given."

"Why, I think," said Aramis, "that since his ring does not come from a mistress, and consequently is not a love-token, D'Artagnan may sell it."

"My dear Aramis, you speak like theology personified. Your opinion, then, is —"

"Sell the diamond."

"Well, then," said D'Artagnan gayly, "let us sell the diamond, and say no more about it."

The fusillade was still going on; but the friends were out of range, and the Rochellais only fired to soothe their consciences.

"Faith! it was time that idea came into Porthos's head — here we are in camp. Therefore, gentlemen, not a word more of this affair. We are observed — they are coming to meet us; we shall be borne in in triumph."

In fact, as we have said, the whole camp was in commotion. More than two thousand persons had been present, as at a play, at this fortunate escapade of the four friends, an escapade of the real motive of which no one had a suspicion. Nothing was heard but cries of "Hurrah for the musketeers! Hurrah for the guards!" M. de Busigny was the first to come and shake Athos by the hand, and acknowledge that the wager was lost. The dragoon and the Swiss followed him, and all their comrades followed the dragoon and the Swiss. There was no end to the congratulations, pressures of the hand, and embraces; there was inextinguishable laughter at the Rochellais. The tumult at length became so great that the cardinal fancied there was a riot, and sent La Houdinière, his captain of the guards, to find out what was going on.

The affair was described to the messenger with all the effervescence of enthusiasm.

"Well?" asked the cardinal, on seeing La Houdinière return.

"Well, monseigneur," replied the latter, "three musketeers and a guardsman laid a wager with M. de Busigny that they

would go and breakfast in the Bastion Saint-Gervais, and while breakfasting they held it for two hours against the enemy, and have killed I don't know how many Rochellais."

"Did you inquire the names of the three musketeers?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"What are their names?"

"MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

"Always my three brave fellows!" murmured the cardinal.

"And the guard?"

"M. d'Artagnan."

"Still my young scapegrace. Positively, these four men must be mine."

That same evening the cardinal spoke to M. de Tréville of the morning's exploit, which was the talk of the whole camp. M. de Tréville, who had received the account of the adventure from the very mouths of the heroes of it, related it in all its details to his Eminence, not forgetting the episode of the napkin.

"Very well, Monsieur de Tréville," said the cardinal; "pray let me have that napkin. I will have three fleur-de-lis embroidered on it in gold, and will give it to your company as a standard."

"Monseigneur," said M. de Tréville, "that will hardly be doing justice to the guards. M. d'Artagnan is not mine; he serves under M. des Essarts."

"Well, then, take him," said the cardinal; "when four men are so much attached to one another, it is only fair that they should serve in the same company."

That same evening M. de Tréville announced this good news to the three musketeers and D'Artagnan, inviting all four to breakfast with him next morning.

D'Artagnan was beside himself with joy. We know that the dream of his life had been to become a musketeer.

The three friends were likewise greatly delighted.

"Faith!" said D'Artagnan to Athos, "that was a triumphant idea of yours! As you said, we have acquired glory, and were enabled to carry on a conversation of the greatest importance."

"Which we can resume now without anybody suspecting us, for, with God's aid, we shall henceforth pass for cardinals."

That evening D'Artagnan went to present his compliments to M. des Essarts, and inform him of his promotion.

M. des Essarts, who esteemed D'Artagnan, offered to aid him

in any way, as this change of corps would entail expenses for outfit.

D'Artagnan respectfully declined, but thinking the opportunity a good one, he begged him to have the diamond he put into his hand valued, as he wished to turn it into money.

By eight o'clock next morning, M. des Essarts's valet came to D'Artagnan's lodging, and gave him a purse containing seven thousand livres.

This was the price of the queen's diamond.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

ATHOS had invented the phrase: *family affair*. A family affair was not subject to the cardinal's investigation; a family affair concerned no one; people might employ themselves in a family affair before all the world.

Thus Athos had discovered the words: *family affair*.

Aramis had discovered the idea: the lackeys.

Porthos had discovered the means: the diamond.

D'Artagnan alone had discovered nothing; he, ordinarily the most inventive of the four; but it must also be said that the mere mention of milady paralyzed him.

Oh, no! we were mistaken; he had discovered a purchaser for his diamond.

The breakfast at M. de Tréville's was delightfully gay. D'Artagnan was already in his uniform; for as he was nearly of the same size as Aramis, and as Aramis had been so liberally paid by the bookseller who purchased his poem, as we remember, he had bought two of everything, and so he furnished his friend with a complete outfit.

D'Artagnan would have been at the height of his wishes, if he had not constantly seen milady, like a dark cloud, on the horizon.

After breakfast, it was agreed that they should meet again in the evening at Athos's lodgings, and would there end the affair.

D'Artagnan passed the day in exhibiting his musketeer's uniform in every street of the camp.

In the evening, at the appointed hour, the four friends met. There remained only three things to be decided on:

What they should write to milady's brother;

What they should write to the clever person at Tours;
And which should be the lackeys to carry the letters.

Each one offered his own: Athos talked of the discretion of Grimaud, who never spoke a word but when his master unlocked his mouth. Porthos boasted of the strength of Mousqueton, who was big enough to thrash four men of ordinary size. Aramis, confiding in Bazin's skill, delivered a pompous eulogy of his candidate; and finally D'Artagnan had entire faith in Planchet's bravery and reminded them of the manner in which he had conducted himself in the ticklish affair at Boulogne.

These four virtues disputed the prize for a long time, and gave opportunity for magnificent speeches, which we will not repeat here, lest they should be deemed wearisome.

"Unfortunately," said Athos, "the one we send must possess in himself alone the four qualities united."

"But where is such a lackey to be found?"

"Not to be found!" cried Athos; "I know that; so take Grimaud."

"Take Mousqueton!"

"Take Bazin!"

"Take Planchet. Planchet is brave and shrewd; that's two qualities out of the four."

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "the chief point is not to know which of our four lackeys is the discreetest, the strongest, the cleverest, or the bravest; the thing is to know which loves money the best."

"What Aramis says is very sensible," replied Athos; "we must speculate on people's faults, and not on their virtues. Abbé, you are a great moralist!"

"Doubtless," said Aramis; "for we not only require to be well served in order to succeed, but, still more, in order not to fail; for, in case of failure, heads are at stake, not for our lackeys —"

"Speak lower, Aramis," said Athos.

"You are right; not the lackey's," resumed Aramis, "but the master's. And even the masters'! Are our lackeys sufficiently devoted to us to risk their lives for us? No."

"Faith!" said D'Artagnan, "I would almost answer for Planchet."

"Well, my dear friend, add to his natural devotion a good sum of money which may give him some comfort, and then, instead of answering for him once, answer for him twice."

"Why, good heavens! you will be deceived just the same,"

said Athos, who was an optimist when things were concerned, and a pessimist when men were in question. "They will promise everything for the sake of the money, and on the road fear will prevent them from acting. Once taken, they will be put to the torture; when put to the torture they will confess everything. What the devil, we are not children! To go to England" (Athos lowered his voice) "they must cross all France covered with the cardinal's spies and creatures; a pass must be obtained to set sail; and one ought to know English in order to inquire the way to London. Really, I consider the thing very difficult!"

"Not at all," cried D'Artagnan, who was very anxious the thing should be done. "On the contrary, I think it is very easy. It would be, no doubt. Of course, by Jove! if we write to Lord Winter about affairs of vast importance, of the cardinal's horrors —"

"Speak lower!" said Athos.

"Of state intrigues and secrets," continued D'Artagnan, complying with the recommendation, "no doubt we shall be all broken on the wheel; but, for God's sake, do not forget, as you yourself said, Athos, that we only write to him concerning a family affair; that we only write to him to entreat that as soon as milady arrives in London, he will put it out of her power to injure us. I will write to him then nearly in the following terms."

"Let us see," said Athos, assuming a critical look.

"Sir, and dear friend'—"

"Ah! yes! 'dear friend' to an Englishman," interrupted Athos; "a fine beginning! Bravo, D'Artagnan! With that one word you would be quartered instead of broken on the wheel."

"Well! so be it. I will say then, 'Sir,' quite short."

"You may even say 'Milord,'" replied Athos, who stickled for propriety.

"Milord, do you remember the little goat pasture of the Luxembourg?"

"Good! the Luxembourg, now! They will suppose it is an allusion to the queen-mother! That's ingenious," said Athos.

"Well, then, we will put simply, 'Milord, do you remember a certain little inclosure where your life was spared?'"

"My dear D'Artagnan, you will never make anything but a very bad secretary, 'Where your life was spared'! For shame! that's unworthy. A man of spirit is not to be reminded of such services. To reproach a person with a benefit conferred is an insult."

"Oh, my dear!" said D'Artagnan, "you are insupportable! If the letter must be written under your censure, 'pon my word, I renounce the task."

"And you do right. Handle the musket and the sword, my dear fellow; you come off splendidly at those two exercises; but hand the pen over to the abbé; that's his province."

"Ay, ay," said Porthos, "hand the pen over to Aramis; he writes theses in Latin."

"Well, so be it," said D'Artagnan; "draw up this note for us, Aramis; but, by our holy father the pope, be concise, for I shall pluck you in my turn, I warn you."

"I ask nothing better," said Aramis, with that ingenuous self-confidence which every poet has; "but let me know what I am about; I have heard, in one way and another, that Lord Winter's sister-in-law was vile. It was even proved to me when I overheard her conversation with the cardinal."

"Worse than vile, ye gods!" said Athos.

"But," continued Aramis, "the details escape me."

"And me also," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan and Athos looked at each other for some time in silence. At length Athos, after reflection, and growing paler than usual, gave an affirmative nod. D'Artagnan understood by it he was at liberty to speak.

"Well, this is what you have to say," said D'Artagnan:

"Milord, your sister-in-law is an infamous woman, who has wished to have you killed, that she might inherit your wealth. But she could not be your brother's wife, as she had already been married in France, and had been —"

D'Artagnan stopped as if seeking for the word, and looked at Athos.

"Repudiated by her husband."

"Because she had been branded," continued D'Artagnan.

"Bah!" cried Porthos, "impossible! She wanted to have her brother-in-law killed?"

"Yes."

"And she had been married?" asked Aramis.

"Yes."

"And her husband found out that she had a fleur-de-lis on her shoulder?" cried Porthos.

"Yes."

Three times Athos had said "yes," and each time with a deeper intonation.

"And who has seen this fleur-de-lis?" asked Aramis.

"D'Artagnan and I, or rather, to observe the chronological order, I and D'Artagnan," replied Athos.

"And does this frightful creature's husband still live?" asked Aramis.

"He still lives."

"Are you quite sure of it?"

"I am."

There was a moment of chilling silence, during which every one was affected, according to his nature.

"This time," said Athos, first breaking the silence, "D'Artagnan has given us an excellent program, and this must be written at once."

"The devil! you are right, Athos," said Aramis; "and the wording of it is difficult. The chancellor himself would be puzzled how to write such a letter, and yet the chancellor draws up a report very agreeably. Never mind! Be silent, I will write it."

Aramis accordingly took the pen, reflected for a few moments, wrote eight or ten lines in a charming little feminine hand, and then, in a soft, slow voice, as if each word had been scrupulously weighed, he read the following:

"MILORD:

"The person who writes these lines had the honor of crossing swords with you in a little yard near the Rue d'Enfer. As you have several times since been kind enough to call yourself that person's friend, he thinks it his duty to respond to your friendship by sending you important information. Twice you have almost been the victim of a near relative whom you believe to be your heir, because you do not know that before she contracted a marriage in England, she was already married in France. But the third time, which is this, you may succumb. Your relative left Rochelle for England during the night. Be on the watch for her arrival, for she has great and terrible projects. If you absolutely insist on knowing what she is capable of, read her past history upon her left shoulder."

"Well, now, that's wonderfully well done," said Athos; "really, my dear Aramis, you have the pen of a secretary of state. Lord Winter will now be upon his guard, if the letter should reach him; and even if it should fall into the cardinal's hands, we shall not be compromised. But as the lackey who goes may make us believe he has been to London and may stop at Châtellerault, let us give him only half the sum with the

letter, promising that he shall have the other half in exchange for the reply. Have you the diamond?" continued Athos.

"I have what is still better: I have the value of it."

And D'Artagnan threw the purse on the table. At the sound of the gold, Aramis raised his eyes and Porthos started; Athos remained unmoved.

"How much is there in that purse?"

"Seven thousand livres, in louis of twelve francs."

"Seven thousand livres!" cried Porthos; "that wretched little diamond was worth seven thousand livres?"

"It seems so," said Athos, "since here they are; I don't suppose that our friend D'Artagnan has added any of his own."

"But, gentlemen, in all this," said D'Artagnan, "we have no thought of the queen. Let us look a little after her dear Buckingham's health. That is the least we owe her."

"You are right," said Athos, "but that falls to Aramis."

"Well," replied the latter, "what must I do?"

"Oh! it's simple enough," replied Athos; "write a second letter for that clever personage who lives at Tours."

Aramis resumed his pen, reflected a little more, and wrote the following lines, which he immediately submitted to his friends' approbation:

"My dear cousin."

"Ah! ha!" said Athos, "this clever lady is your relative, then?"

"She's my cousin-german."

"Good — for your cousin, then!"

Aramis continued:

"MY DEAR COUSIN: His Eminence the cardinal, whom God preserve for the happiness of France and the confusion of the enemies of the kingdom, is on the point of finishing up with the heretic rebels of Rochelle; it is probable that the aid of the English fleet will never even arrive in sight of the place. I will even venture to say that I am certain the Duke of Buckingham will be prevented from starting for there by some great event. His Eminence is the most illustrious politician of times past, of times present, and probably of times to come. He would extinguish the sun, if the sun incommoded him. Give these happy tidings to your sister, my dear cousin. I have dreamed that that cursed Englishman was dead. I cannot recollect whether it was by steel or by poison; only I am sure of this: I have dreamed he was dead, and you know my dreams never deceive me. Be assured, then, of seeing me soon return."

“Capital,” cried Athos; “you are the king of poets, my dear Aramis, you speak like the Apocalypse, and you are as true as the Gospel. There is nothing now for you to do but to put the address on your letter.”

“That’s easily done,” said Aramis.

He folded the letter coquettishly, took it, and wrote:

“To Mademoiselle Michon, seamstress, Tours.”

The three friends looked at each other and laughed; they were caught.

“Now,” said Aramis, “you understand, gentlemen, that Bazin is the only person who can carry this letter to Tours; my cousin knows no one but Bazin, and places confidence in no one else; any other person would fail. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned; Bazin has read history, gentlemen. He knows that Sixtus V. became pope after having tended pigs. Then, as he means to enter holy orders at the same time as myself, he does not despair of becoming a pope in his turn, or at least a cardinal. You understand that a man who has such views will never allow himself to be taken, or, if taken, will undergo martyrdom rather than speak.”

“Well, well,” said D’Artagnan, “I grant you Bazin with all my heart, but let me have Planchet. Milady one day had him turned out of doors, with a sound caning. Now Planchet has an excellent memory, and I will be bound that if he can see possible means of vengeance, he will let himself be beaten to death rather than fail. If your affairs of Tours are your affairs, Aramis, those of London are mine. I beg, then, that Planchet may be chosen, especially as he has already been to London with me, and knows how to say very correctly, *London, sir, if you please*, and, *My master, Lord D’Artagnan*; with that, you may be satisfied, he can make his way, both going and returning.”

“In that case,” said Athos, “Planchet must receive seven hundred livres for going, and seven hundred livres for coming back; and Bazin, three hundred livres for going, and three hundred livres for coming back. That will reduce the sum to five thousand livres. We will each take a thousand livres, to be employed as seems good to each, and we will leave a fund of a thousand livres, in the guardianship of the abbé here, for extraordinary occasions or common necessities. Does that suit you?”

“My dear Athos,” said Aramis, “you speak like Nestor.”

Planchet was sent for, and instructions were given him. He

had already been notified by D'Artagnan, who had shown him first the glory, next the money, and then the danger.

"I will carry the letter in the lining of my coat," said Planchet, "and if I am taken I will swallow it."

"Well, but then you will not be able to fulfil your commission," said D'Artagnan.

"You will give me a copy of it this evening, and I will know it by heart before morning."

D'Artagnan looked at his friends as if to say, "Well, what did I promise you?"

"Now," continued he, addressing Planchet, "you have eight days to get to Lord Winter, you have eight days to return in, in all sixteen days; if, on the sixteenth day after your departure, at eight o'clock in the evening, you are not here, no money, even if it be but five minutes past eight —"

"Then, sir," said Planchet, "buy me a watch."

"Take this," said Athos, with his usual careless generosity, giving him his own, "and be a good lad. Remember, if you talk, if you babble, if you get drunk, you risk your master's head — your master, who has so much confidence in your fidelity that he is responsible to us for you. But remember, also, that if, by your fault, any evil happens to D'Artagnan, I will find you, wherever you are, and for the express purpose of disembowelling you."

"Oh, sir!" said Planchet, humiliated by the suspicion, and, above all, terrified at the musketeer's calm air.

"And I," said Porthos, rolling his big eyes, "remember, I will skin you alive."

"Ah, sir!"

"And I," said Aramis, in his soft, melodious voice, "remember that I will roast you at a slow fire, like a savage."

"Ah, sir!"

And Planchet began to weep; we will not venture to say whether it was from terror caused by the threats, or from tenderness at seeing four friends so closely united.

D'Artagnan took his hand and kissed him.

"See, Planchet," said he, "these gentlemen only say all this out of affection for me, but at heart they all respect you."

"Ah, sir," said Planchet, "I will succeed, or I will consent to be quartered; and if they quarter me, be assured that not a morsel of me will speak."

It was decided that Planchet should set out at eight o'clock the next morning, in order, as he had said, that he might learn the letter by heart during the night. He gained just

twelve hours by this arrangement; he was to be back on the sixteenth day, by eight o'clock in the evening.

In the morning as he was mounting his horse, D'Artagnan, who felt at the bottom of his heart a partiality for the duke, took Planchet aside.

"Listen," said he to him; "when you have given the letter to Lord Winter, and he has read it, you will further say to him, 'Watch over his Grace, Lord Buckingham, for there is a plot to assassinate him.' But, Planchet, you see this is so serious and important that I have not informed my friends that I would intrust this secret to you; and for a captain's commission I would not write it."

"Be at rest, sir," said Planchet; "you shall see whether confidence can be placed in me or not."

And, mounted on an excellent horse, which he was to leave at the end of twenty leagues to take the post, Planchet set off at a gallop, a little anxious by the threefold threat made him by the musketeers, but otherwise as light-hearted as possible.

Bazin set out the next day for Tours, and was allowed a week in which to perform his commission.

The four friends, all the while these two were away, had, as may well be supposed, their eyes more than ever on the watch, their ears pricked up, and every sense alert. Their days were spent in trying to catch whatever was said, in observing the cardinal's proceedings, and in looking out for all the couriers who arrived. More than once an insurmountable trembling seized them when called upon for any unexpected service. They had, besides, to look constantly to their own safety; milady was a phantom which, when it had once appeared to people, did not allow them to sleep very quietly.

On the morning of the eighth day, Bazin, fresh as ever, and smiling as usual, entered the tavern of the Infidel as the four friends were sitting down to breakfast, saying, as had been agreed upon:

"Monsieur Aramis, here is your cousin's answer."

The four friends exchanged a joyful glance. Half of the work was done. It is true, however, that it was the shortest and the easiest half.

Aramis took the letter, which was in a large, coarse hand, and ill spelt.

"Good gracious!" cried he, laughing, "I really despair of my poor Michon; she will never write like M. de Voiture."

"Vot do you mean by your boor Migeon?" asked the Swiss,

who was chatting with the four friends when the letter arrived.

"Oh, by Jove! less than nothing," said Aramis; "a little charming seamstress, whom I loved dearly, and from whom I requested a few autograph lines as a sort of keepsake."

"Ze teffil!" said the Swiss; "if ze lady is as kreat as her writing is large, you are lucky fellow, gomrat!"

Aramis read the letter, and passed it to Athos.

"See what she writes to me, Athos," said he.

Athos cast a glance over the epistle, and, to dissipate all the suspicions that might have been created, read aloud:

"MY COUSIN: My sister and I are very skilful in interpreting dreams, and even entertain great fear of them; but of yours it may be said, I hope, every dream is an illusion. Farewell! Take care of yourself, and act so that we may, from time to time, hear you spoken of.

"AGLAE MICHON."

"And what dream does she mean?" asked the dragoon, who had approached during the reading.

"Yes; what's the tream?" said the Swiss.

"Well, by Jove!" said Aramis, "it was only this: I had a dream, and I related it to her."

"Oh, yes, py Kot, yes; it's simple enough to dell a tream ven you haff vun; but I neffer tream."

"You are very fortunate," said Athos, rising; "I wish I could say as much!"

"Neffer!" replied the Swiss, enchanted that a man like Athos could envy him anything. "Neffer! neffer!"

D'Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did the same, took his arm, and went out.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind to encounter the jokes of the dragoon and the Swiss.

Bazin went and lay down on a truss of straw; and as he had more imagination than the Swiss, he dreamed that Aramis had become a pope, and was adorning his head with a cardinal's hat.

But as we have said, Bazin, by his fortunate return, had removed only a part of the uneasiness which weighed on the four friends. Days of expectation are long, and D'Artagnan, in particular, would have wagered that these days contained forty-eight hours. He forgot the necessary slowness of navigation, he mentally exaggerated milady's power. He came to believe that this woman, who seemed to him like a demon, had

auxiliaries as supernatural as herself. At the least noise he imagined that he was about to be arrested, and that Planchet was being brought back to be confronted with himself and his friends. Moreover his confidence in the worthy Picard, at one time so great, grew less each day. His anxiety became so great that it even extended to Aramis and Porthos. Athos alone remained calm, as though no danger hovered over him, and as though he were breathing his usual atmosphere.

On the sixteenth day, in particular, these signs of anxiety were so manifest in D'Artagnan and his two friends that they could not remain quiet in one place, and they wandered about, like ghosts, on the road by which Planchet was expected.

"Really," said Athos, "you are not men, but children, to let a woman terrify you so! And what is it all about, after all? Being imprisoned? Well, but we should be got out of prison; Madame Bonacieux got out. Being beheaded? Why, every day in the trenches we go cheerfully to expose ourselves to worse than that, for a bullet may break a leg, and I am convinced a surgeon would give us more pain in cutting our thighs than an executioner would in cutting off our heads. Wait quietly, then; in two hours, in four, in six hours at the latest, Planchet will be here. He promised to be here, and I have very great faith in Planchet's promises, I think him a very good lad."

"But if he does not come?" said D'Artagnan.

"Well, if he does not come, it will be because he has been delayed, that's all. He may have fallen from his horse, he may have slipped down on the deck, he may have travelled so fast as to get inflammation of the lungs. Eh! gentlemen, let us reckon upon accidents! Life is a chaplet of little miseries, which the philosopher with a smile tells off one at a time. Be philosophers, as I am, gentlemen; sit down to the table and let us drink. Nothing makes the future look so bright as surveying it through a glass of chambertin."

"That's very well," replied D'Artagnan, "but I am tired of fearing, when I open a fresh bottle, that the wine may come from milady's cellar."

"You are hard to suit," said Athos; "such a beautiful woman!"

"A woman of mark!" said Porthos, with his loud laugh.

Athos started, passed his hand over his brow to wipe off the drops of perspiration, and rose in his turn with a nervous movement he could not repress.

The day, however, passed away, and the evening came on

slower than ever, but it came. The tap-rooms were filled with drinkers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, seldom quitted the Infidel. He had found in M. de Busigny, who, by the way, had given them a magnificent dinner, a partner worthy of his company. They were playing together, as usual, when seven o'clock struck; the patrols were heard passing to double the posts; at half-past seven tattoo was sounded.

"We are lost," said D'Artagnan in Athos's ear.

"You mean we have lost," said Athos quietly, drawing four pistoles from his pocket, and flinging them on the table. "Come, gentlemen," said he, "they are beating the tattoo—to bed, to bed!"

And Athos went out of the Infidel, followed by D'Artagnan. Aramis came behind, giving his arm to Porthos. Aramis mumbled verses, and Porthos, from time to time, pulled a hair or two from his moustache, as a sign of despair.

But lo and behold! suddenly a shadow appears in the darkness, the outline of it is familiar to D'Artagnan, and a well-known voice says:

"Sir, I have brought your cloak, for it is chilly this evening."

"Planchet!" cried D'Artagnan, intoxicated with joy.

"Planchet!" repeated Aramis and Porthos.

"Well, certainly, Planchet," said Athos; "what is there astonishing in that? He promised to be back by eight o'clock, and eight is just now striking. Bravo! Planchet, you are a lad of your word, and if ever you leave your master I promise you a place in my service."

"Oh! no, never," said Planchet. "I will never leave M. d'Artagnan."

At the same time D'Artagnan felt Planchet slipping a note into his hand.

D'Artagnan was strongly inclined to kiss Planchet on his return as he had kissed him on his departure; but he feared lest such effusiveness lavished on his lackey in the open street might appear extraordinary to some spectator, and he restrained himself.

"I have a note," said he to Athos and his friends.

"Very well," said Athos, "let us go home and we will read it."

The note burned in D'Artagnan's hand; he wished to hasten; but Athos took his arm and passed it under his own, and the young man was obliged to regulate his pace by his friend's.

At length they reached the tent, lit a lamp, and whilst Planchet stood at the entrance so that the four friends might not be surprised, D'Artagnan with a trembling hand broke the seal and opened the letter so anxiously expected.

It contained half a line in a thoroughly British hand, and of thoroughly Spartan brevity.

"Thank you, be easy."

Athos took the letter from D'Artagnan's hands, drew near to the lamp, set fire to it, and did not let go of it till it was reduced to ashes.

Then, calling Planchet, —

"Now, my lad," said he, "you may claim your seven hundred livres, but you did not run much risk with such a note as that."

"'Twas not from lack of trying every means to compass it," said Planchet.

"Well," cried D'Artagnan, "tell us about it."

"Ah, sir, it's a very long story!"

"You are right, Planchet," said Athos; "besides, tattoo has been sounded, and we should be observed if we kept a light burning longer than the others."

"So be it," said D'Artagnan. "Let us go to bed. Planchet, sleep soundly."

"Faith, sir! It will be the first time I have done so these sixteen days!"

"Or I either!" said D'Artagnan.

"Or I either!" said Porthos.

"Or I either!" said Aramis.

"Well, if I must tell you the truth, — or I either!" said Athos.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FATALITY.

MEANTIME milady, drunk with rage, roaring on the deck of the vessel like a lioness embarked, had been tempted to leap into the sea in order to regain the coast, for she could not get rid of the idea that she had been insulted by D'Artagnan and threatened by Athos, and after all was leaving France without being revenged on either.

This idea soon became so insupportable to her that, at the risk of whatever terrible consequences might result to herself

from it, she implored the captain to put her on shore; but the captain, anxious to escape from his false position, placed between French and English cruisers like the bat between the rats and the birds, was in great haste to reach the English coast, and positively refused to obey what he considered a woman's whim, though he promised his passenger, since she had been particularly recommended to him by the cardinal, to land her at one of the ports of Brittany, either at Lorient or Brest, if the sea and the French permitted. But the wind was contrary, the sea rough; they kept beating to windward and tacking about. Nine days after leaving the Charente, milady, pale with anger and annoyance, saw only the blue coasts of Finisterre appear.

She calculated that to cross this corner of France and return to the cardinal would take her at least three days; add another day for landing, and that made four; add these four days to the others, that would be thirteen days lost — thirteen days, during which so many important events might happen in London. She reflected, likewise, that the cardinal would be angry at her return, and, consequently, would be more disposed to listen to the complaints made against her than to the accusations she brought against others.

She, therefore, allowed the vessel to pass Lorient and Brest without repeating her request to the captain, and he took care not to remind her of it. So milady continued her voyage, and on the very day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth for France, his Eminence's messenger entered the port in triumph.

All the city was stirred by an extraordinary commotion — four large ships recently built had just been launched. Standing on the jetty, his clothes bedizened with gold, glittering, as usual, with diamonds and precious stones, his hat ornamented with a white feather which drooped on his shoulder, Buckingham was seen surrounded by a staff almost as brilliant as himself.

It was one of those rare and beautiful winter days when England remembers that there is a sun. The orb, pale, but nevertheless splendid still, was declining toward the horizon. tingeing at once the heavens and the sea with bands of purple fire, and casting on the towers and the old houses of the city a last golden ray, making the windows sparkle like the reflection of a fire. Milady, on breathing that sea air which grows more and more invigorating and balsamic according as one nears the land, on contemplating all the power of that army which she was to combat alone — she, a woman — with a few bags

of gold, compared herself mentally to Judith, the terrible Jewess, when she penetrated into the camp of the Assyrians, and beheld the enormous mass of chariots, horses, men, and arms, which a gesture of her hand was to dissipate like a cloud of smoke.

They entered the roadstead, but as they were making ready to cast anchor, a little cutter, formidably armed and purporting to be a coast-guard, approached the merchant vessel, and dropped into the sea its gig, which directed its course to the ladder. The gig contained an officer, a boatswain, and eight oarsmen. The officer alone got on board, where he was received with all the deference inspired by a uniform.

The officer conversed a few moments with the captain, had him read several papers, of which he was the bearer, and, on the merchant-captain's order, all on board, both passengers and crew, were called on deck.

After this kind of summons had been given, the officer inquired aloud about the place of the brig's departure, of her route, of her landings, and all these questions the captain answered without hesitation and without difficulty.

Then the officer began to pass in review all the individuals, one after the other, and stopping in front of milady surveyed her very closely, but without addressing a single word to her. He then went up to the captain, again said a few words to him, and, as if from that moment the vessel was under his command, he ordered a manœuvre which the crew immediately executed.

Then the vessel resumed her course, still escorted by the little cutter, which sailed side by side with it, threatening her side with the mouths of its six cannon, while the boat followed in the wake of the ship.

While the officer made his scrutiny of milady, milady, as may well be imagined, had been sharply eying him. But great as was the power of this woman, with eyes of flame in reading the hearts of those whose secrets she wished to divine, she met this time with a face so impenetrable that no discovery followed her investigation. The officer who had stopped before her, and silently studied her with so much care, might have been twenty-five or twenty-six years old. He had a pale complexion, with clear blue eyes, rather deeply set; his mouth, fine and well cut, remained motionless in its correct lines; his chin, strongly set, denoted that strength of will which, in the ordinary Britannic type, usually stands only for obstinacy; a brow a little receding, as is proper for poets.

enthusiasts, and soldiers, was scarcely shaded by short thin hair, which, like the beard covering the lower part of his face, was of a beautiful deep-chestnut color.

When they entered the port, it was already nightfall. The fog made the darkness still denser, and formed round the beacons and the lantern of the jetty a circle like that which surrounds the moon when the weather threatens to become rainy. The air they breathed was gloomy, damp, and cold.

Milady, courageous as she was, shivered in spite of herself.

The officer desired to have milady's luggage pointed out to him, ordered it to be placed in the boat, and when this operation was completed, he offered her his hand and invited her to descend.

Milady looked at the man, and hesitated.

"Who are you, sir," she asked, "that you are so kind as to busy yourself so particularly on my account?"

"You must see, madame, by my uniform, that I am an officer in the English navy," replied the young man.

"But is it the custom for officers in the English navy to give their services to their female compatriots who land at a port of Great Britain, and to carry their gallantry so far as to bring them ashore?"

"Yes, madame, it is our custom, not from gallantry, but prudence, in time of war, to bring foreigners to certain hotels, in order that they may be under the eye of the government, until full information can be obtained about them."

These words were spoken with the most exact politeness and the most perfect calmness. Nevertheless, they had not the power of convincing milady.

"But I am not a foreigner, sir," said she, with an accent as pure as ever was heard between Portsmouth and Manchester; "my name is Lady Clarick, and this measure —"

"This measure is general, madame; and you would not succeed in escaping from it."

"I will follow you, then, sir."

And accepting the officer's hand, she began to climb down the ladder, at the foot of which the gig was awaiting her. The officer followed her. A large cloak was spread in the stern. The officer had her sit down on the cloak, and placed himself beside her.

"Give way!" said he, to the sailors.

The eight oars fell at once into the sea, making but a single sound, giving a single stroke, and the gig seemed to fly over the surface of the water.

At the end of five minutes they reached shore.

The officer sprang on the quay, and offered milady his hand.

A carriage was in waiting.

"Is this carriage for us?" asked milady.

"Yes, madame," replied the officer.

"So the hotel is at some distance?"

"At the other end of the town."

"Very well," said milady; and she got resolutely into the carriage.

The officer saw that the baggage was fastened carefully behind the carriage; and when this operation was over, he took his place beside milady and shut the door.

Instantly, without any order being given, or place of destination indicated, the coachman set off at a gallop, and plunged into the streets of the town.

Such a strange reception naturally gave milady ample matter for reflection; so, seeing that the young officer did not seem at all disposed to talk, she reclined in her corner of the carriage, and passed in review all the suppositions which presented themselves, one after the other, to her mind.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, however, surprised at the length of the road, she leaned forward toward the window to see where she was going. No houses were to be seen; trees appeared in the darkness like great black phantoms running after one another.

Milady shuddered.

"But we are no longer in the town, sir," said she.

The young officer was silent.

"I will go no farther, unless you tell me where you are taking me. I warn you, sir."

This threat brought no reply.

"Oh! but this is too much," cried milady. "Help! help!"

No voice replied to hers. The carriage continued to roll rapidly on. The officer seemed like a statue.

Milady looked at the officer with one of those terrible expressions characteristic of her face, and which so rarely failed of their effect. Anger made her eyes flash in the darkness.

The young man remained unmoved.

Milady tried to open the door and throw herself out.

"Take care, madame," said the young man coldly; "you will kill yourself if you attempt to jump out."

Milady sat down again, foaming with rage. The officer leaned forward, looked at her, and seemed surprised to see

that face, but just before so beautiful, distorted with passion and become almost hideous.

The artful creature realized that she was injuring herself by allowing him thus to read her soul. She composed her features, and in a complaining voice said :

"In the name of heaven, sir, tell me if I am to attribute the violence that is done me to you, or to your government, or to an enemy."

"No violence is done you, madame, and what happens to you is the result of a very simple measure which we are compelled to take with all who land in England."

"Then you don't know me, sir?"

"It is the first time I ever had the honor of seeing you."

"And, on your honor, you have no cause of hatred against me?"

"None, I swear to you."

There was so much serenity, coolness, mildness even, in the young man's voice that milady felt reassured.

At length, after nearly an hour's ride, the carriage stopped before an iron gate, which shut in a sunken avenue leading to a castle severe in form, massive, and isolated. Then, as the wheels rolled over a fine gravel, milady could hear a dull roar, which she recognized as the noise of the sea dashing against a rock-bound coast.

The carriage passed under two arched gateways, and at length stopped in a dark, square court. Almost immediately the carriage door was opened, the young man sprang lightly to the ground, and gave milady his hand. She leaned on it, and in her turn alighted quite calmly.

"Still, the fact is I am a prisoner," said milady, looking around her, and then fixing her eyes on the young officer with a most gracious smile; "but I feel assured it will not be for long," added she; "my own conscience and your politeness, sir, are the guarantees of that."

Flattering as this compliment was, the officer made no reply, but drawing from his belt a little silver whistle, such as boatswains use in ships of war, he whistled three times, with three different modulations. Several men then appeared, unharnessed the smoking horses, and put the carriage into a coach-house.

The officer, always with the same calm politeness, invited his prisoner to enter the house. She, always with the same smiling countenance, took his arm, and passed with him under a low arched door, which, by a vaulted passage, lighted only

at the farther end, led to a stone staircase turning round a stone column. Then they paused before a massive door, which, after the young officer had inserted a key into the lock, turned heavily on its hinges, and disclosed the chamber destined for milady.

With a single glance the prisoner took in the apartment in its minutest details.

It was a chamber, the furniture of which was at once suited to a prison or the dwelling of a free man; yet the bars at the windows and the outside bolts on the door decided the question in favor of the prison. For an instant all this creature's strength of mind abandoned her. She sank into an arm-chair, with her arms folded, her head hanging down, and expecting every instant to see a judge enter to question her.

But no one entered except two marines, who brought in her trunks and packages, deposited them in a corner of the room, and retired without speaking.

The officer presided over all these details with the same calmness milady had always observed in him, never uttering a word, and making himself obeyed by a gesture of his hand or a sound of his whistle.

One might have said that between this man and his inferiors spoken language did not exist, or had become useless.

At length milady could hold out no longer. She broke the silence:

"In the name of heaven, sir," cried she, "what is the meaning of all this? Put an end to my doubts. I have courage enough for any danger I can foresee, for any misfortune I can comprehend. Where am I, and why am I here? If I am free, why these bars and these doors? If I am a prisoner, what crime have I committed?"

"You are here in the apartment destined for you, madame. I received orders to go and take charge of you at sea, and to conduct you to this castle; this order, I believe, I have accomplished with all a soldier's strictness, but also with all the courtesy of a gentleman. Here ends, at least for the present, the duty I had to fulfil toward you; the rest concerns another person."

"And who is this other person?" asked milady; "can you not tell me his name?"

At that moment a great jingling of spurs was heard on the stairs. People talking together went by, the sounds of voices died away, and the noise made by a single footstep approached the door.

"Here he is, madame," said the officer, leaving the entrance clear, and drawing himself up in an attitude of respect and submission.

At the same time the door opened; a man appeared on the threshold.

He had no hat on, wore a sword at his side, and was crushing a handkerchief in his hand.

Milady thought she recognized this shadow in the shadow; she leaned with one hand on the arm of the chair, and protruded her head as if to meet a certainty.

Then the stranger advanced slowly, and as he advanced into the circle of light projected by the lamp, milady involuntarily drew back.

Then, when she had no longer any doubt, —

"What! my brother," cried she, at the culmination of her amazement, "is it you?"

"Yes, fair lady," replied Lord Winter, making a bow, half courteous, half ironical, "it is I, myself."

"Then this castle?"

"Is mine."

"This room?"

"Is yours."

"I am your prisoner, then?"

"Nearly so."

"But this is a frightful abuse of power!"

"No high-sounding words. Let us sit down and talk calmly, as brother and sister ought to do."

Then, turning toward the door, and seeing that the young officer was waiting for his last orders:

"It is all right," said he; "I thank you; now leave us alone, Mr. Felton."

CHAPTER L.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

WHILE Lord Winter was shutting the door, opening a shutter, and drawing a chair near to his sister-in-law's arm-chair, milady was thoughtfully plunging her glance into the depths of possibility, and discovered the whole plot, not even a glimpse of which she could get so long as she was ignorant into whose hands she had fallen. She knew her brother-in-law was a worthy gentleman, a bold huntsman, an intrepid player, enterprising with women, but with less than average

skill in intrigues. How could he have discovered her arrival? caused her to be seized? Why did he detain her?

Athos had indeed said some words which proved that the conversation she had had with the cardinal had fallen into others' ears; but she could not suppose that he had dug a counter mine so promptly and so boldly. She feared, rather, that her preceding operations in England had been discovered. Buckingham might have guessed that it was she who had cut off the two studs, and avenged herself for that little treachery. But Buckingham was incapable of going to any excess against a woman, particularly if that woman was supposed to have acted from a feeling of jealousy.

This supposition appeared to her the most reasonable; it seemed to her that they wanted to revenge the past, and not to anticipate the future. At all events, she congratulated herself on having fallen into the hands of her brother-in-law, with whom she reckoned she could come off easily, rather than into the hands of an avowed and intelligent enemy.

"Yes, let us talk, brother," said she, with a kind of sprightliness, now that she had decided to get from the conversation, in spite of all dissimulation Lord Winter could bring to it, the information of which she stood in need for regulating her future conduct.

"So you decided to come to England again," said Lord Winter, "in spite of the resolutions you so often manifested in Paris never to set your foot again on British soil?"

Milady replied to this question by another question.

"Before everything," said she, "tell me how you had me watched so closely as to be aware in advance, not only of my arrival, but, still more, of the day, the hour, and the port at which I should arrive?"

Lord Winter adopted the same tactics as milady, thinking that as his sister-in-law employed them they must be good.

"But tell me, my dear sister," replied he, "what have you come to do in England?"

"Why, to see you," replied milady, without knowing how much she aggravated, by this reply, the suspicions which D'Artagnan's letter had given birth to in her brother-in-law's mind, and only desiring to gain her auditor's good-will by a falsehood.

"Ah, to see me?" said Lord Winter craftily.

"Certainly, to see you. What is there astonishing in that?"

"And you had no other object in coming to England but to see me?"

"No."

"So it was for my sake alone you took the trouble to cross the channel?"

"For your sake only."

"The deuce! What affection, my sister!"

"Why, am I not your nearest relative?" demanded milady, in a tone of the most touching ingenuousness.

"And my only heir, are you not?" said Lord Winter in his turn, fixing his eyes on milady's.

In spite of herself, milady could not help starting, and as, in pronouncing the last words, Lord Winter laid his hand on his sister's arm, this start did not escape him.

In fact, the blow was direct and deep. The first idea that occurred to milady's mind was that she had been betrayed by Kitty, and that she had told the baron about her interested aversion toward him, of which she had imprudently allowed some marks to escape her before her servant; she also recollected the furious and imprudent attack she had made upon D'Artagnan when he spared her brother's life.

"I do not comprehend, my lord," said she, to gain time and make her adversary speak out. "What do you mean? Is there any secret meaning concealed beneath your words?"

"Oh! dear me! no," said Lord Winter, with apparent good-nature, "you wish to see me, and you come to England. I learn of this desire, or rather I suspect that you feel it, and, in order to spare you all the annoyances of an arrival at night in a port, and all the fatigues of landing, I send one of my officers to meet you, I place a carriage at his orders, and he brings you here to this castle, of which I am governor, where I come every day, and where, in order to satisfy our mutual desire of seeing each other, I have prepared a chamber for you. What is there in all that I have said to you more astonishing than in what you have told me?"

"No; but what I find astonishing is that you should be informed of my coming."

"And yet that is the most simple thing in the world, my dear sister. Did you not observe that the captain of your little vessel, on entering the road, sent forward, to obtain permission to enter the port, a small gig bearing his log-book and the register of his crew? I am commandant of the port; they brought me that book. I recognized your name in it. My heart told me what your mouth has just confirmed, that is to say, with what view you have exposed yourself to the dangers of such a perilous sea, or at least a sea so wearisome just at

this time, and I sent my cutter to meet you. You know the rest."

Milady comprehended that Lord Winter lied, and was only the more alarmed.

"Brother," continued she, "was not that my Lord Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty this evening, as we entered the port?"

"It was, indeed. Ah! I can understand how the sight of him struck you," replied Lord Winter; "you come from a country where he must be very much talked about, and I know that his armaments against France greatly engage your friend the cardinal's attention."

"My friend the cardinal!" cried milady, seeing that, on this point, as well as on the other, Lord Winter seemed perfectly well informed.

"Is he not your friend?" replied the baron negligently; "ah! I beg your pardon, I thought he was. But we will return to my lord duke presently. Let us not depart from the quite sentimental turn our conversation had taken. You said you came to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I replied that your every wish should be fulfilled, and that we should see each other every day."

"Am I then to remain here eternally?" demanded milady, in some terror.

"Do you find yourself poorly lodged, sister? Ask for anything you lack, and I will hasten to have you furnished with it."

"But I have neither my women nor my people."

"You shall have all that, madame. Tell me on what footing your household was established by your first husband, and, though I am only your brother-in-law, I will arrange it on a similar one."

"My first husband!" cried milady, looking at Lord Winter with startled eyes.

"Yes, your French husband; I don't speak of my brother. However, if you have forgotten, as he is still living I could write to him, and he would send me information on the subject."

A cold sweat started from milady's brow.

"You are joking!" said she, in a hollow voice.

"Do I look as if I were?" asked the baron, rising and taking a step backward.

"Or, rather, you insult me," continued she, pressing with

her contracted hands the two arms of her chair, and raising herself up on her wrists.

"I insult you!" said Lord Winter contemptuously; "in truth, madame, do you think that is possible?"

"In truth, sir," said milady, "you are either drunk or mad. Leave the room, sir, and send me a woman."

"Women are very indiscreet, sister! Couldn't I serve you as a waiting-maid? By that means, all our secrets would be kept in the family."

"Insolent wretch!" cried milady. And, as if moved by a spring, she sprang toward the baron, who was waiting her attack with his arms folded, but with one hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Come! come!" said he, "I know you have the habit of assassinating people, but I shall defend myself, I warn you, even against you."

"No doubt you would!" said she; "you have every appearance of being coward enough to lift your hand against a woman."

"Perhaps I am. Besides, I have an excuse, for mine would not be the first man's hand that has been placed upon you, I imagine."

And the baron pointed with a slow and accusing gesture to milady's left shoulder, which he almost touched with his finger.

Milady uttered a muffled roar, and retreated to a corner of the room, like a panther when she draws back to leap.

"Oh! roar as much as you please," cried Lord Winter, "but don't try to bite, for I warn you the thing would be to your prejudice; here there are no solicitors who regulate successions beforehand; there is no knight-errant to come and seek a quarrel with me on account of the fair lady I detain a prisoner; but I have judges all ready, who will quickly dispose of a woman so shameless as to come and steal, a bigamist, into the bed of my oldest brother, Lord Winter, and these judges, I warn you, will give you over to a hangman who will make both your shoulders alike."

He continued, but with increasing warmth:

"Yes, I understand how, after inheriting my brother's fortune, it would have been very agreeable to you to be my heir likewise; but know, beforehand, if you kill me, or cause me to be killed, my precautions are taken: not a penny of what I possess will pass into your hands. Are you not already rich enough, possessing now nearly a million? and could you not

stop your fatal career, if you did not do evil only for the infinite and supreme delight of doing it? Oh! be assured, if my brother's memory were not sacred to me, you should rot in a state dungeon, or satisfy the curiosity of sailors at Tyburn. I will be silent, but you must endure your captivity quietly. In fifteen or twenty days I shall set out for Rochelle with the army; but before my departure, a vessel which I shall see set sail will take you away and convey you to our southern colonies; and be assured I will give you a companion who will blow your brains out at the first attempt you may make to return to England or the continent."

Milady listened with an attention that dilated her inflamed eyes.

"Yes, at present," continued Lord Winter, "you will remain in this castle. The walls of it are thick, the doors strong, and the bars solid. Moreover, your window opens immediately over the sea. The men of my crew, who are devoted to me for life and death, mount guard around this apartment, and watch all the passages leading to the castle yard. Even if you gained the yard, there would still be three iron gates for you to pass through. The order given is positive; a step, a gesture, a word, on your part, implying an effort to escape, and you will be fired upon. If they kill you, English justice will be under obligations to me for saving it trouble. Ah! your features are resuming their calmness, your countenance is recovering its assurance; 'Fifteen days, twenty days,' say you; 'bah! I have an inventive mind, before that has expired some idea will occur to me; I have an infernal spirit, I shall find some victim. Before a fortnight has gone by,' you say to yourself, 'I shall be away from here!' Well, try! The officer who commands alone here in my absence you have seen, and therefore already know him; as you must have observed, he knows how to obey orders, for I am sure you did not come from Portsmouth here without trying to make him speak. What do you say to that? Could a statue of marble have been more impassive and more mute? You have already tried the power of your seductions on many men, and, unfortunately, you have always succeeded: try them on him. By God! if you succeed with him, I pronounce you the demon himself."

He went to the door and opened it hastily.

"Call Mr. Felton," said he. "Wait a minute longer, and I will commend you to him."

Between these two people a strange silence ensued, during

which the sound of a slow and regular step was heard ~~as~~ approaching. Soon a human form appeared in the shade of the corridor, and the young lieutenant, whose acquaintance we have already made, stopped at the door to receive the baron's orders.

"Come in, my dear John," said Lord Winter, "come in and shut the door."

The young officer entered.

"Now," said the baron, "look at this woman. She is young, she is beautiful, she has all earthly seductions. Well, she is a monster, who, at twenty-five, has been guilty of as many crimes as you could read of in a year in the archives of our tribunals. Her voice prejudices in her favor; her beauty serves as a bait to her victims; her body even pays what she promises — I must do her that justice. She will try to seduce you, perhaps she will even try to kill you. I have extricated you from poverty, Felton, I have had you made lieutenant, I once saved your life, you know on what occasion. I am not only your protector, but your friend; not only a benefactor, but a father to you. This woman came back again into England for the purpose of conspiring against my life. I hold this serpent in my hands. Well, I call on you and say to you: 'Friend Felton, John, my son, guard me, and more particularly guard thyself against this woman. Swear by thy hopes of salvation to keep her safely for the punishment she has deserved. John Felton, I trust in thy word! John Felton, I believe in thy loyalty!'"

"My lord," said the young officer, summoning to his mild countenance all the hatred he could find in his heart, "my lord, I swear to you all shall be done as you desire."

Milady received this look like a resigned victim. It was impossible to imagine a more submissive or a milder expression than that which prevailed on her beautiful countenance. Lord Winter himself could scarcely recognize the tigress whom, a minute before, he was preparing to fight.

"She is never to leave this room, understand, John; she is not to correspond with any one, she is to speak to no one but you — if, indeed, you wish to do her the honor of addressing a word to her."

"That is quite sufficient, my lord! I have sworn."

"And now, madame, try to make your peace with God, for you are judged by men!"

Milady let her head sink, as if she felt herself crushed by this sentence. Lord Winter went out, making a sign to Felton, who followed him and shut the door.

An instant after, the heavy step of a marine was heard in the corridor, serving on sentinel's duty, with his axe in his girdle and his musket on his shoulder.

Milady remained for some minutes in the same position, for she thought they might perhaps be watching her through the keyhole. Then she slowly raised her head, and, assuming a formidable expression of menace and defiance, ran to the door to listen, looked out of her window, and, returning to bury herself again in her large arm-chair, she reflected.

CHAPTER LI.

OFFICER.

MEANWHILE, the cardinal was anxiously looking for news from England; but no news arrived except what was annoying and threatening.

Well as Rochelle was invested, certain as success might appear, owing to the precautions taken, and above all to the dyke preventing the entrance of any vessel into the besieged city, yet still the blockade might last for a long time, and this was a great affront to the king's arms, and a great inconvenience to the cardinal, who had no longer, it is true, to embroil Louis XIII. with Anne of Austria, for that affair was done, but he had to reconcile M. de Bassompierre and the Duc d'Angoulême, who were engaged in a quarrel.

Monsieur, who had begun the siege, now left to the cardinal the task of finishing it.

The city, notwithstanding its mayor's incredible perseverance, had attempted a sort of mutiny in favor of surrendering; the mayor had hanged the ringleaders. This execution subdued the worst of the mutineers, who then resolved to allow themselves to die of hunger. This death always seemed to them slower and not so sure as death by strangulation.

The besiegers from time to time took the messengers which the Rochellais sent to Buckingham, or the spies which Buckingham sent to the Rochellais. In either case the trial was soon over. The cardinal pronounced the single word "Hanged!" The king was invited to come and see the hanging. The king came languidly, placing himself in a good situation to see all the details; this always amused him a little, and made him endure the siege patiently; but it did not prevent his getting

very much bored, or from talking at every moment of returning to Paris; so that if the messengers and the spies had failed, his Eminence, in spite of all his imagination, would have found himself very much embarrassed.

Nevertheless, time went on, and the Rochellais did not surrender. The last spy taken was the bearer of a letter. The letter to be sure informed Buckingham that the city was reduced to the last extremity; but instead of adding, "If your aid does not arrive within a fortnight we shall surrender," it merely added, "If your aid does not arrive within a fortnight, we shall all be dead of starvation when it does arrive."

The Rochellais, then, had no hope except in Buckingham — Buckingham was their Messiah. It was evident that if they one day learned to a certainty that they could no longer count on Buckingham, their courage would fail with their hope.

So the cardinal was most impatiently awaiting news from England that would announce to him that Buckingham would not come.

The question of carrying the city by assault, though often debated in the king's council, had always been rejected. In the first place, Rochelle appeared impregnable; then the cardinal, whatever he said, knew very well that the horrible bloodshed in this encounter, when Frenchmen would be fighting against Frenchmen, meant a retrograde movement of sixty years impressed on politics, and the cardinal was for those days what we now call a man of progress. In fact, the sacking of Rochelle, and the massacre of three or four thousand Huguenots who would allow themselves to be butchered, would resemble too closely, in 1628, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572. And then, above all, this extreme measure, to which the king, being a good Catholic, felt no repugnance at all, always fell to the ground before the one argument of the besieging generals — Rochelle is impregnable except by famine.

The cardinal could not drive from his mind the fear he entertained concerning his terrible emissary, for he well understood this woman's strange qualities, now serpent like, now lion like. Had she betrayed him? Was she dead? He knew her well enough in all cases to know that while acting for him or against him, as a friend or an enemy, she would not remain motionless unless blocked by great obstacles. But whence did such obstacles arise? That was what he could not know.

However, he reckoned, and rightly, on milady. He had divined in this woman's past terrible things which his red

cloak alone could cover; and he felt that, from one cause or another, this woman was his own, as she could find in no one but in him a support superior to the danger which threatened her.

He resolved, therefore, to carry on the war alone, and to look for any success foreign to himself only as we look for a fortunate chance. He continued to push the building of the famous dyke, which was to starve Rochelle. Meanwhile he cast his eyes over that unfortunate city, which contained so much deep misery and so many heroic virtues, and recalling the saying of Louis XI., his political predecessor as he himself was Robespierre's predecessor, he recalled this maxim of Tristan's royal gossip: "Divide in order to reign."

Henry IV., when besieging Paris, had loaves and provisions thrown over the walls. The cardinal had little notes thrown over, in which he represented to the Rochellais how unjust, selfish, and barbarous was the conduct of their leaders. "These leaders had corn in abundance, and would not let them partake of it." They adopted this maxim, — for they, too, had maxims, — that it was of very little consequence whether the women, the children, and the old men died, so long as the men who were to defend the walls remained strong and healthy. Up to that time, whether from devotion or from want of power to resist it, this maxim, without being generally adopted, had, nevertheless, passed from theory to practice. But the notes did it injury. The notes reminded the men that the children, women, and old men who were allowed to die were their sons, their wives, and their fathers, and that it would be more just if every one were reduced to the common level of poverty, in order that one and the same position might give birth to unanimous resolutions.

These notes had all the effect that he who wrote them could expect, for they induced a great number of the inhabitants to open private negotiations with the royal army.

But just as the cardinal saw his scheme already bearing fruit, and was applauding himself for having put it in action, an inhabitant of Rochelle, who had succeeded somehow in passing the royal lines, in spite of the watchfulness of Bassompierre, Schomberg, and the Duc d'Angoulême, themselves watched by the cardinal, — an inhabitant of Rochelle, we say, entered the city, coming from Portsmouth, and said that he had seen a magnificent fleet ready to sail within a week. Moreover, Buckingham announced to the mayor that at length the great league against France was about to be proclaimed.

and that the kingdom would be at once invaded by the English, Imperial, and Spanish armies. This letter was read publicly in all the squares, copies were posted at the corners of the streets, and even those who had begun to open negotiations interrupted them, determined to await the aid so pompously announced.

This unexpected circumstance brought back Richelieu's former anxieties, and forced him, in spite of himself, to turn his eyes once more to the other side of the sea.

During this time, exempt from these anxieties of its only real leader, the royal army led a jolly life, there being no lack of provisions, or money either, in the camp; all the corps rivalled one another in audacity and gayety. To take spies and hang them, to make hazardous expeditions upon the dyke or the sea, to conjure up foolish plans and execute them coolly, such were the pastimes which made the army find these days short, which were so long not only to the Rochellais, a prey to famine and distress, but also to the cardinal, who was blockading them so closely.

Sometimes when the cardinal, who was always on horseback, like the lowest gendarme of the army, was casting a pensive glance over those works, which the engineers, brought from all the corners of France, were executing under his orders, though at a pace hardly commensurate with his desires, and met a musketeer of Tréville's company, he would draw near and look at him in a peculiar manner, but if he did not recognize in him one of our four companions, he would turn his keen eyes and mighty thoughts in some other direction.

One day when the cardinal, oppressed by mortal weariness of mind, hopeless of the negotiations with the city, without news from England, had gone out with no other aim than to ride, accompanied only by Cahusac and La Houdinière, skirting the beaches and mingling the immensity of his dreams with the immensity of the ocean, he came ambling along to a hill, from the top of which he perceived, behind a hedge, reclining on the sand, in the sun so rare at this period of the year, seven men surrounded by empty bottles. Four of these men were our musketeers, preparing to listen to a letter one of them had just received. This letter was so important that it caused them to abandon their cards and their dice on a drum-head.

The other three were occupied in uncorking an enormous demijohn of Collioure wine; they were the gentlemen's lackeys.

The cardinal was, as we have said, in very low spirits, and

when he was in that state of mind, nothing increased his depression so much as gayety in others. Besides, he had another strange fancy, which was always to believe that the causes of his sadness created the gayety of others. Making a sign to La Houdinière and Cahusac to stop, he alighted from his horse, and went toward those suspected merry-makers, hoping, by means of the sand which deadened the sound of his steps, and of the hedge which concealed his approach, to catch some words of a conversation which seemed so interesting to him. Ten paces from the hedge he recognized the Gascon prattle, and as he had already perceived that these men were musketeers, he had no doubt that the three others were those called "the inseparables," that is to say, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

As may well be supposed, his desire to hear the conversation was increased by his discovery. His eyes took on a strange expression, and with the step of a cat he advanced toward the hedge. But he had not been able as yet to make out anything more than vague syllables without any positive sense, when a short, sonorous cry made him start, and attracted the attention of the musketeers.

"Officer!" cried Grimaud.

"I believe you are speaking, you rascal!" said Athos, rising on his elbow, and fascinating Grimaud with his flashing eyes.

Grimaud therefore said not a word more, but contented himself with pointing his index finger at the hedge, signifying by this gesture the presence of the cardinal and his escort.

With a single bound the musketeers were on their feet, and saluted respectfully.

The cardinal seemed furious.

"It seems that the musketeers set sentinels for themselves!" said he. "Are the English expected by land, or do the musketeers consider themselves officers of rank?"

"Monseigneur," replied Athos, for, amidst the general alarm, he alone had preserved that calmness and *sang froid* which never forsook him, — "monseigneur, the musketeers, when they are not on duty, or when their duty is over, drink and play at dice, and they are officers of very high rank for their lackeys."

"Lackeys!" grumbled the cardinal; "lackeys who are ordered to warn their masters when any one passes are not lackeys, they are sentinels."

"Your Eminence may perceive that, if we had not taken this precaution, we should have been in danger of letting you

pass without presenting you our respects, or offering you our thanks for the favor you have done us in uniting us. D'Artagnan," continued Athos, "you were only just now so anxious for such an opportunity for expressing your thanks to monseigneur,—here it is, avail yourself of it."

These words were pronounced with that perfect imperturbability which distinguished Athos in the hour of danger, and with that excessive politeness which made of him, at certain moments, a king more majestic than kings by birth.

D'Artagnan came forward and stammered out a few words of thanks, which soon expired under the cardinal's gloomy looks.

"No matter, gentlemen," continued the cardinal, without appearing to be in the least diverted from his first intention by the incident which Athos had raised, "no matter, gentlemen; I do not like simple soldiers, because they have the advantage of serving in a privileged corps, thus to play the great lords, and discipline is the same for them as for everybody else."

Athos allowed the cardinal to finish his sentence completely, and, bowing in sign of assent, he replied in his turn:

"Discipline, monseigneur, has in no way, I hope, been forgotten by us. We are not on duty, and we believe that, as we are not on duty, we are at liberty to dispose of our time as we please. If we are so fortunate as to have some particular command from your Eminence, we are ready to obey you. Your Eminence may perceive," continued Athos, frowning, for such an investigation began to annoy him, "that we have come out with our arms so as to be ready for the least alarm."

And he showed the cardinal the four muskets stacked near the drum on which were the cards and dice.

"We beg your Eminence to believe," added D'Artagnan, "that we should have come to meet you, if we could have supposed it was you coming toward us with so few attendants."

"Do you know what you look like, always together, as you are, armed, and sentinelled by your lackeys?" said the cardinal; "you look like four conspirators."

"Oh! so far, monseigneur, it's true," said Athos; "we do conspire, as your Eminence might have seen the other day, only we conspire against the Rochellais."

"Eh, politicians!" replied the cardinal, frowning in his turn; "the secret of many things unknown might perhaps be found in your brains, if we could read in them as you were reading that letter which you concealed when you saw me coming."

The color mounted to Athos's face, and he made a step toward his Eminence.

"One would think that you really suspected us, monseigneur, and that we are undergoing a cross-examination. If it be so, we trust your Eminence will deign to explain yourself, and we shall then at least be acquainted with our real position."

"And if it were an examination," replied the cardinal, "others beside you have undergone such, Monsieur Athos, and have replied to them."

"So, monseigneur, I have told your Eminence that you had but to question us, and we are ready to reply."

"What was that letter you were about to read, Monsieur Aramis, and which you concealed?"

"A woman's letter, monseigneur."

"Oh! I understand; we must be discreet with such letters. But nevertheless we may show them to a confessor, and, you know, I have taken orders."

"Monseigneur," said Athos, with a calmness all the more terrible that he risked his life when he made this reply, "the letter is a woman's, but it is neither signed Marion de Lorme nor Madame d'Arguillon."

The cardinal became as pale as death. A flash of fire darted from his eyes. He turned round as if to give an order to Cahusac and Houdinière. Athos saw the movement; he took a step toward the muskets, on which the other three friends had fixed their eyes like men ill-disposed to allow themselves to be arrested. The cardinal's party consisted of only three; the musketeers, lackeys included, numbered seven. He judged that the match would be so much the less equal, if Athos and his companions were really plotting; and by one of those quick changes which he always had at command, all his anger faded away into a smile.

"Come! come!" said he, "you are brave young men, proud in daylight, faithful in darkness; no fault can be found with you for watching over yourselves, when you watch so carefully over others. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night in which you served me as an escort to the Red Dovecote. If there were any danger to be apprehended on the road I am going, I should request you to accompany me; but as there is none, remain where you are, finish your bottles, your game, and your letter. Farewell, gentlemen!"

And remounting his horse, which Cahusac had led to him, he saluted them with his hand and rode away.

The four young men, standing motionless, followed him

with their eyes, without speaking a single word, until he had disappeared.

Then they looked at one another.

All showed their consternation and terror in their faces; for, notwithstanding his Eminence's friendly farewell, they plainly perceived that the cardinal went away with rage in his heart.

Athos alone smiled with a self-possessed, disdainful smile.

When the cardinal was out of hearing and sight, —

"That Grimaud kept but tardy watch!" cried Porthos, anxious to visit his ill-humor on some one.

Grimaud was about to excuse himself. Athos lifted his finger, and Grimaud was silent.

"Would you have given up the letter, Aramis?" said D'Artagnan.

"I!" said Aramis, in his most flute-like tone; "I had made up my mind; if he had insisted on the letter being given up to him, I would have presented the letter to him with one hand, and with the other I would have run my sword through his body."

"I expected as much," said Athos; "and that was why I interfered between you and him. Truly, this man is very unwise to talk in this way to other men; one would say he had never had to do with any but women and children."

"My dear Athos," said D'Artagnan, "I admire you very much, but nevertheless we were in the wrong, after all."

"How in the wrong!" exclaimed Athos. "Whose, then, is the air we breathe? Whose is the ocean on which we look? Whose is the sand on which we were reclining? Whose is that letter of your mistress's? The cardinal's? 'Pon my honor, this man fancies the world belongs to him. There you stood, stammering, stupefied, confounded. One might have supposed that the Bastille appeared before you, and that the gigantic Medusa was converting you into stone. Come, now, is to be in love conspiring? You are in love with a woman whom the cardinal has caused to be shut up, and you wish to get her out of the cardinal's hands. That's a game you are playing with his Eminence; this letter is your hand; why should you show your hand to your adversary? That is never done. If he finds it out, well and good. We are finding out his, aren't we?"

"In truth, what you say has sense in it, Athos," said D'Artagnan.

"In that case, let there be no more question of what has

just occurred, and let Aramis resume the letter from his cousin, where the cardinal interrupted him."

Aramis took the letter from his pocket, the three friends surrounded him, and the three lackeys grouped themselves again near the demijohn.

"You had only read a line or two," said D'Artagnan; "so begin the letter over again."

"Willingly," said Aramis.

"MY DEAR COUSIN: I think I shall decide to set out for Stenay, where my sister has placed our little servant in the convent of the Carmelites. This poor child is resigned; she knows she cannot live elsewhere without risking the salvation of her soul. However, if the affairs of our family are settled, as we hope they will be, I believe she will run the risk of being damned, and will return to those whom she misses, particularly as she knows they are always thinking of her. In the meanwhile, she is not altogether wretched; what she most desires is a letter from her intended. I know that such commodities pass with difficulty through the gratings; but after all, as I have proved to you, my dear cousin, I am not unskilled, and I will take charge of the commission. My sister thanks you for your good and eternal remembrance. She underwent for a moment considerable anxiety; but she is now at length a little reassured, having sent her secretary yonder, in order that nothing may happen unexpectedly.

"Farewell, my dear cousin; let us hear from you as often as possible; that is to say, whenever you can send with safety. I embrace you.

"MARIE MICHON."

"Oh, what do I not owe you, Aramis?" cried D'Artagnan. "Dear Constance! I have at length, then, news of her! She lives, she is in safety in a convent, she is at Stenay! Where do you suppose Stenay is, Athos?"

"Why, a few leagues from the frontiers of Alsace, in Lorraine. When the siege is once over we shall be able to make a tour in that direction."

"And that will not be long, it is to be hoped," said Porthos, "for this morning they hung a spy who confessed that the Rochellais had come to the leather of their shoes. Supposing that after having eaten the leather they eat the soles, I cannot see what they have left, unless they eat one another."

"Poor fools!" said Athos, emptying a glass of excellent Bordeaux wine, which without having at that period the

reputation it now enjoys no less merited it. "Poor fools! As if the Catholic religion was not the most agreeable of all religions! All the same," resumed he, after having smacked his tongue against his palate, "they are brave fellows. But what the devil are you about, Aramis?" continued Athos. "Why, you are squeezing that letter into your pocket!"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan. "Athos is right. It must be burnt. Who knows whether the cardinal has not a secret for examining ashes?"

"He must have one," said Athos.

"What are you going to do with the letter, then?" asked Porthos.

"Come here, Grimaud," said Athos.

Grimaud got up and obeyed.

"As a punishment for having spoken without permission, my friend, you will please eat this piece of paper. Then, to recompense you for the service you will have rendered us, you shall afterwards drink this glass of wine. Here is the letter. First, chew vigorously."

Grimaud smiled; and, with his eyes fixed on the glass which Athos had just filled to the brim, he crushed the paper and swallowed it.

"Bravo, Master Grimaud!" said Athos. "And now take this. Good! I excuse you from saying 'Thank you.'"

Grimaud silently swallowed the glass of Bordeaux wine; but his eyes, raised toward heaven during the whole time this delicious occupation lasted, spoke a language which, though mute, was none the less expressive.

"And now," said Athos, "unless the cardinal should form the ingenious idea of ripping up Grimaud, I think we may be almost free from anxiety."

Meantime his Eminence was continuing his melancholy ride, murmuring between his moustaches what he so often said before:

"These four men must positively be mine."

CHAPTER LII.

THE FIRST DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

LET us return to milady, whom our eyes, turned toward the coast of France, have lost from sight for an instant.

We shall find her in the despairing attitude in which we left her, plunged in an abyss of dismal reflections, a dismal hell, at the gate of which she has almost left hope behind. For now for the first time she doubts, for the first time she fears.

On two occasions her fortune has failed her, on two occasions she has found herself discovered and betrayed; and on both these occasions she failed before the fatal genius, sent doubtlessly by Heaven to combat her: D'Artagnan has conquered her; her, the invincible power of evil.

He had deceived her love, humbled her pride, thwarted her ambition, and now he is ruining her fortune, depriving her of liberty, and even threatening her life. Moreover he has lifted the corner of her mask, that ægis with which she covered herself, and which rendered her so strong.

From Buckingham, whom she hates as she hates all she has loved, D'Artagnan averted the tempest with which Richelieu threatened him in the person of the queen. D'Artagnan had passed himself off on her as De Wardes, for whom she had conceived one of those invincible tigress-like fancies common to women of her character. D'Artagnan knows the terrible secret which she has sworn no one should know without dying. Finally, just as she has obtained from Richelieu a signed permit by means of which she is going to take vengeance on her enemy, this paper is torn from her hands, and D'Artagnan holds her prisoner, and is about to send her to some filthy Botany Bay, some infamous Tyburn of the Indian ocean.

For all this, doubtless, D'Artagnan is responsible; from whom can come so many disgraces heaped on her head, if not from him? He alone could have transmitted to Lord Winter all these frightful secrets, which he has discovered, one after another, in consequence of Fate. He knows her brother-in-law, he must have written to him.

What hatred she distils! There, motionless, with her burning, fixed eyes, in her lonely room, how well the paroxysms of her muffled roaring, which at times escape with her breathing from the depths of her chest, accompany the sound of the surge which rises, growls, roars, and breaks against the rocks

on which is built this dark and haughty castle! By the light of the flashes with which her tempestuous passion illumines her mind, how many magnificen projects of vengeance she conceives against Madame Bonacieux, against Buckingham but, above all, against D'Artagnan, — projects lost in the distances of the future!

Yes, but in order to avenge herself she must be free; and to be free, a prisoner has to pierce a wall, unfasten bars, cut through a floor, — all undertakings which a strong, patient man may accomplish, but in which a woman's feverish nervousness must fail. Besides, to do all this time is necessary, — months, years, — and she has ten or twelve days, as Lord Winter, her fraternal and terrible jailer, told her.

And yet if she were a man she would attempt all this, and, perhaps, would succeed; why, then, did heaven make the mistake of placing a masculine soul in her frail, delicate body?

The first moments of her captivity, therefore, were terrible; but a few convulsions of rage which she could not overcome paid to nature her debt of feminine weakness. But by degrees she subdued the outbursts of her mad passion; the nervous tremblings which agitated her frame disappeared, and now she remains folded back on herself, like a fatigued serpent reposing.

"Come, come! I must have been mad to be carried away so," says she, plunging into the glass, which reflects back the burning glance by which she seems to question herself. "No violence; violence is a proof of weakness. In the first place, I have never succeeded by that means. Perhaps if I employed my strength against women, I should have a chance to find them weaker than myself, and consequently to conquer them. But I battle with men, and for them I am only a woman. Let us battle like a woman, then. My strength is in my weakness."

Then, as if to render an account to herself of the changes she could impose upon her countenance, so mobile and so expressive, she made it assume successively all expressions, from passionate anger, which convulsed her features, to the sweetest, most affectionate, and most seducing smile. Then her hair in turn, under her skilful hands, took on all the undulations she thought might assist the charms of her face. At length she murmured, satisfied with herself:

"Come, nothing is lost. I am still beautiful."

It was then almost eight o'clock in the evening. Milady

perceived a bed; she felt that a few hours' repose would refresh not only her brain and her ideas, but, still further, her complexion. A better idea, however, came into her mind before going to bed. She had heard something said about supper. She had already been an hour in this apartment. It could not be long before her repast would be brought. The prisoner was anxious not to lose any time. She resolved to make that very evening some attempts to ascertain the lay of the land by studying the characters of the people to whose guardianship she was committed.

A light appeared under the door. This light announced the reappearance of her jailers. Milady, who had arisen, quickly sat down again in her arm-chair, her head thrown back, her beautiful hair unbound and dishevelled, her bosom half bare beneath her crumpled laces, one hand on her heart and the other hanging down.

The bolts were drawn, the door creaked on its hinges, steps sounded in the chamber and drew near.

"Stand that table there," said a voice which the prisoner recognized as Felton's.

The order was obeyed.

"You will bring lights and relieve the sentinel," continued Felton.

This double order, which the young lieutenant gave to the same individuals, proved to milady that her servants were the same men as her guards — that is to say, soldiers.

Felton's orders were, moreover, executed with a silent rapidity that proved the excellent state in which he maintained discipline.

At length Felton, who had not yet looked at milady, turned toward her.

"Ah! ha!" said he, "she is asleep; 'tis well; when she wakes she can sup.

And he took some steps toward the door.

"But, lieutenant!" said a soldier a little less stoical than his officer, and who had approached milady, "this woman is not asleep."

"What! not asleep!" said Felton.

"She has fainted away; her face is very pale, and I have listened in vain; I can't hear her breathe."

"You are right," said Felton, after looking at milady from the spot on which he stood, without moving a step toward her; "go and tell Lord Winter that his prisoner has fainted. The case not having been foreseen, I don't know what to do."

The soldier went out to obey his officer's orders; Felton sat down on the arm-chair which happened to be near the door, and waited without speaking a word, without making a gesture. Milady possessed that great art, so much studied by women, of looking through her long eyelashes without appearing to open the lids; she perceived Felton, as he sat with his back to her. She continued to look at him during nearly ten minutes, and in these ten minutes the impassive guardian never once turned round.

She then thought that Lord Winter would come, and by his presence give fresh strength to her jailer; her first trial was lost; she decided like a woman who reckons on her resources; consequently she raised her head, opened her eyes, and sighed feebly.

At this sigh Felton at last turned round.

"Ah! you are awake again, madame," he said; "then I have nothing more to do here. If you want anything, you can ring."

"Oh! my God! my God! how I have suffered," murmured milady, in her musical voice, which, like those of the ancient enchantresses, charmed all whom she wished to destroy.

And, as she sat up in the arm-chair, she assumed a still more graceful and voluptuous position than that she had exhibited when reclining.

Felton rose.

"You will be served thus, madame, three times a day," said he. "In the morning at nine o'clock, in the day at one o'clock, and in the evening at eight. If that does not suit you, you can point out what other hours you prefer, and in this respect your wishes will be complied with."

"But am I to remain always alone in this vast and dismal chamber?" asked milady.

"A woman of the neighborhood has been sent for who will be at the castle to-morrow. She will come to you as often as you desire her presence."

"I thank you, sir," replied the prisoner, humbly.

Felton made a slight bow and started toward the door. Just as he was about to cross the threshold, Lord Winter appeared in the corridor, followed by the soldier who had been sent to inform him of milady's fainting. He held a vial of salts in his hand.

"Well, what's going on here?" said he, in a jeering voice, on seeing the prisoner sitting up and Felton about to go out. "Has this dead woman come to life again already? By Jove!

Felton, my lad, did you not see that she took you for a novice, and that we have been seeing the first act of a comedy of which we shall doubtless have the pleasure of following out all the developments?"

"I imagined that might be the case, my lord," said Felton. "But as the prisoner is a woman, after all I wished to pay her the attention that every man of gentle birth owes to a woman, if not on her account, at least on his own."

Milady shuddered through her whole frame. These words of Felton's passed like ice through her veins.

"So," replied De Winter, laughing, "that beautiful hair, so skilfully dishevelled, that white skin and that languishing look, have not yet seduced you, you heart of stone?"

"No, my lord," replied the unfeeling young man; "and, believe me, it requires more than the tricks and coquetries of a woman to corrupt me."

"In that case, my brave lieutenant, let us leave milady to invent something else, and let us go to supper. But don't you worry! She has a fruitful imagination, and the second act of the comedy will follow not long after the first."

And at these words Lord Winter passed his arm through Felton's, and led him out, laughing.

"Oh! I will be a match for you!" muttered milady between her teeth. "Be assured of that, you miserable would-be monk, you miserable converted soldier, who have cut your uniform out of a friar's frock!"

"By the way, milady," resumed Lord Winter, stopping at the door, "you must not let this check take away your appetite. Taste that fowl and those fish. 'Pon honor, they are not poisoned. I agree very well with my cook, and he is not to be my heir. I have full and perfect confidence in him. Do as I do. Farewell, dear sister, till your next fainting-fit!"

This was all milady could endure; and when she was alone a fresh fit of despair seized her; she cast her eyes on the table, saw a knife glittering, rushed toward it and clutched it; but her disappointment was cruel; the blade was blunt, and of flexible silver.

A burst of laughter resounded from the other side of the half-closed door, and the door was reopened.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Lord Winter; "Ha! ha! ha! Don't you see, my brave Felton, don't you see what I told you? That knife was for you, my lad; she would have killed you. Observe, this is one of her eccentricities, to get rid thus, in one way or another, of all the people who inconvenience her.

If I had listened to you, the knife would have been pointed and of steel. Then it would have been all over with Felton. She would have cut your throat, and, after that, every one's else. See, John, how well she knows how to handle a knife."

In fact, milady still held the weapon of offence in her clenched hand, but these last words, this supreme insult, relaxed her hands, her strength, and even her will.

The knife fell to the ground.

"You are right, my lord," said Felton, in a tone of profound disgust, which sounded to the very bottom of milady's heart; "you are right, my lord; I was in the wrong."

And both left the room again.

But this time milady lent a more attentive ear than she did the first time, and she heard their steps die away at the remotest end of the corridor.

"I am lost," murmured she; "I am in the power of men on whom I can have no more influence than if they were bronze statues or granite. They know me by heart, and are hardened against all my weapons. Nevertheless it is impossible that this should end as they have decreed!"

In fact, as was shown by this last reflection, this instinctive return to hope, sentiments of weakness or fear did not dwell long in that deep soul. Milady sat down to table, ate of several dishes, drank a little Spanish wine, and felt all her resolution return.

Before she went to bed, she had commented on, analyzed, turned on all sides, examined on all points, the words, the gestures, the signs, and even the silence of the two men, and the result of her commentary, her analysis, her study, was that Felton, everything considered, was decided to be the more vulnerable of her two persecutors.

One expression above all kept recurring to the prisoner's mind.

"If I had listened to you," Lord Winter had said to Felton.

Felton then had spoken in her favor, since Lord Winter had not been willing to listen to Felton.

"Weak or strong," repeated milady, "that man has a spark of pity in his soul. Of that spark I will make a flame that shall devour him. As to the other, he knows me, he fears me, and knows what he has to expect of me, if ever I escape from his hands. So it is useless to attempt anything with him. But Felton, that's another thing; he is an ingenuous, pure, and apparently virtuous young man; there is a way of getting him."

And milady went to bed; and fell asleep with a smile on her lips. Any one who had seen her sleeping might have said she was a young girl dreaming of the crown of flowers she was to wear on her brow at the next fête.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE SECOND DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

MILADY dreamed that she at length had D'Artagnan in her power, that she was present at his execution; the sight of his odious blood, flowing beneath the executioner's axe, spread that charming smile upon her lips.

She slept as a prisoner sleeps who is rocked by his first hope.

In the morning when they entered her chamber, she was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor. He brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken the evening before, and who had just arrived; this woman entered, and, approaching milady's bed, offered her services.

Milady was habitually pale. Her complexion might therefore deceive a person who saw her for the first time.

"I am in a fever," said she; "I have not slept a single instant during all this long night—I am in frightful pain. Will you be more humane to me than others were to me yesterday? Besides, all I ask is permission to stay in bed."

"Would you like a physician sent for?" asked the woman.

Felton listened to this dialogue without speaking a word.

Milady reflected that the more people she had around her, the more she should have to work upon, and the stricter would be the watch Lord Winter kept over her. Besides, the physician might declare the malady was feigned, and milady, having lost the first game, was not willing to lose the second.

"Send for a physician!" said she; "what would be the good of that? These gentlemen declared yesterday that my illness was a comedy; it would be just the same to-day, no doubt; for, since yesterday evening, they have had plenty of time to send for a doctor."

"Then," said Felton, becoming impatient, "say yourself, madame, what treatment you wish followed."

"Eh! how can I tell? My God! I know that I am in pain, that's all; give me anything you like—it is of very little consequence to me."

"Go get Lord Winter," said Felton, tired of these eternal complaints.

"Oh! no, no!" cried milady; "no, sir, do not call him, I conjure you. I am well, I want nothing; do not call him."

She put such prodigious vehemence, such irresistible eloquence, into this exclamation that Felton, in spite of himself, advanced some steps into the room.

"He has come!" thought milady.

"Now, if you are *really* in pain," said Felton, "a physician shall be sent for; and if you deceive us, — well! why, it will be so much the worse for you, but at least we shall not have to reproach ourselves with anything."

Milady made no reply, but turning her beautiful head over on her pillow, she burst into tears, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

Felton surveyed her for an instant with his usual coolness; then, seeing that the crisis threatened to be prolonged, he left the room; the woman followed him, and Lord Winter did not appear.

"I fancy I begin to see my way," murmured milady, with a savage joy, burying herself under the clothes to conceal from anybody who might be watching her this burst of inward satisfaction.

Two hours passed away.

"Now it is time that the malady should be over," said she; "let us get up and obtain some success this very day; I have but ten days, and this evening two will be gone."

On entering milady's room in the morning, they had brought her breakfast; now she thought it could not be long before they would come to clear the table, and that she should see Felton.

Milady was not mistaken: Felton reappeared again, and without observing whether she had or had not touched her repast, he made a sign for the table to be carried out of the room, as it was brought in all set.

Felton remained behind; he held a book in his hand.

Milady, reclining in an arm-chair near the fireplace, beautiful, pale, and resigned, looked like a holy virgin awaiting martyrdom.

Felton approached her, and said:

"Lord Winter, who is a Catholic, as well as yourself, madame, thinking that the privation of the rites and ceremonies of your church might be painful to you, has consented

that you should read every day the ordinary of *your mass*, and here is a book which contains the ritual of it."

At the manner in which Felton laid the book on the little table near which milady was sitting, at the tone in which he pronounced the two words *your mass*, at the disdainful smile with which he accompanied them, milady raised her head and looked more attentively at the officer.

Then, by the plain arrangement of his hair, by his costume of exaggerated simplicity, by his brow polished like marble, but hard and impenetrable like it, she recognized one of those gloomy Puritans she had so often met with, both at the court of King James and at the court of the king of France, where, in spite of the remembrance of Saint Bartholomew's, they sometimes came to seek refuge.

She then had one of those sudden inspirations which only people of genius have in great crises, in the supreme moments which are to decide their fortunes or their lives.

Those two words, *your mass*, and a simple glance cast on Felton revealed to her all the importance of the reply she was about to make.

But, with that rapidity of intelligence which was peculiar to her, this reply, ready arranged, presented itself to her lips :

"I!" said she, with an accent of disdain struck in unison with that which she had remarked in the young officer's voice. "I, sir! *my mass*! Lord Winter, the corrupted Catholic, knows very well that I am not of his religion, and this is a snare he wishes to set for me!"

"And of what religion are you then, madame?" asked Felton.

"I will tell," cried milady, with a feigned enthusiasm, "on the day when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith."

Felton's look revealed to milady the full extent of the space she had just opened for herself by this single word.

The young officer, however, remained mute and motionless. His look alone had spoken.

"I am in the hands of mine enemies," continued she, with that tone of enthusiasm which she knew was familiar to the Puritans; "well, let my God save me, or let me perish for my God! That is the reply I beg you to make to Lord Winter. And as to this book," added she, pointing to the ritual with her finger, but without touching it, as though she would be contaminated by the touch, "you may carry it back and make use of it yourself; for, doubtless, you are doubly Lord Winter's

accomplice; the accomplice in his persecutions, the accomplice in his heresies."

Felton made no reply, took the book with the same appearance of repugnance which he had before manifested, and retired thoughtfully.

Lord Winter came toward five o'clock in the evening; milady had had time, during all that day, to lay out her plan of conduct. She received him like a woman who has already recovered all her advantages.

"It seems," said the baron, seating himself in the arm-chair opposite the one occupied by milady, and stretching out his legs carelessly on the hearth, "it seems we have made a little apostasy!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that, since we last met, we have changed our religion; can you by chance have married a Protestant for a third husband?"

"Explain yourself, my lord," replied the prisoner majestically, "for, though I hear your words, I declare I do not understand them."

"Then you have no religion at all; I like that best," replied Lord Winter, sneering.

"Certainly, that is more accordant with your own principles," replied milady coldly.

"Well, I confess it makes no difference at all to me."

"Oh! you need not avow your religious indifference, my lord; your debaucheries and crimes would make it perfectly credible."

"What! You talk of debaucheries, Madame Messalina! Lady Macbeth! Either I misunderstand you, or, by God! you are mighty impudent!"

"You only speak so because you know you are listened to, sir," replied milady coldly; "and you wish to interest your jailers and your hangmen against me."

"My jailers and my hangmen! Heyday, madame! You are assuming quite a poetical tone, and yesterday's comedy is turning this evening into a tragedy. As to the rest, in a week you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be completed."

"Infamous task! impious task!" cried milady, with the exaltation of a victim provoking the judge.

"On my word of honor!" said Lord Winter, rising, "I think the hussy is going mad! Come, come, calm yourself, Madame Puritan, or I'll have you put in the dungeon. By Jove! my

Spanish wine has gone to your head, has it not? But never mind; that sort of intoxication is not dangerous and will have no consequences."

And Lord Winter retired swearing, a habit at that period very cavalier-like.

Felton was, in fact, behind the door, and had not lost one word of the scene.

Milady had guessed correctly.

"Yes, go! go!" said she to her brother; "on the contrary, the consequences are drawing near. But you, weak fool! will not see them until it will be too late to avoid them."

Silence was reëstablished. Two hours passed away. Milady's supper was brought in, and she was found deeply engaged in saying her prayers aloud; prayers which she had learned of an old servant of her second husband's, a most austere Puritan. She appeared to be in an ecstasy, and paid not the slightest attention to what was going on around her. Felton made a sign that she should not be disturbed, and when all was arranged he went out quietly with the soldiers.

Milady knew she might be watched, so she continued her prayers to the end; and it seemed to her that the soldier on duty at her door no longer marched with the same step, but seemed to be listening.

For the moment she required nothing further; she rose, placed herself at table, ate but little, and drank only water.

An hour after, her table was cleared; but milady remarked that this time Felton did not accompany the soldiers.

He feared, then, to see her too often.

She turned toward the wall to smile; for there was in her smile such an expression of triumph that this single smile would have betrayed her. She allowed, therefore, half an hour to pass away; and as at that moment all was silent in the old castle, as nothing was heard but the eternal murmur of the waves, — that immense respiration of the ocean, — with her pure, harmonious, and powerful voice she began the first stanza of the psalm then in greatest favor with the Puritans:

"Thou leavest still thy servants, Lord,
To see if they be strong;
But soon again thou dost afford
Thy hand to lead them on."

These verses were not excellent; very far from it, even; but, as it is well known, the Puritans did not pique themselves on their poetry.

As she was singing, milady listened. The soldier on guard at her door stopped, as if he had been changed into stone. Milady could therefore judge of the effect she had produced.

Then she continued her singing with inexpressible fervor and feeling; it seemed to her that the sounds spread afar beneath the vaults, and carried with them a magic charm to soften her jailers' hearts. It, however, seemed that the soldier on duty, a zealous Catholic no doubt, shook off the charm, for through the door —

“Be quiet, madame!” said he; “your song is as dismal as a *De profundis*; and if, besides the pleasure of being in garrison here, we must hear such things as these, no mortal can stand it.”

“Silence!” then said a stern voice, which milady recognized as Felton's. “What business is it of yours, you rascal! Have you been ordered to prevent this woman from singing? No; you were told to guard her; to fire at her if she attempted to fly. Guard her. If she flies, kill her. But don't exceed your orders.”

An expression of unspeakable joy lightened milady's countenance; but this expression was fleeting as the reflection of lightning, and, without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she began again, giving her voice all the charm, all the power, all the seduction, the demon had bestowed upon it:

“For all my tears and all my cares,
My exile and my chains,
I have my youth, I have my prayers,
And God who counts my pains.”

Her voice, of unusual range and of sublime expression, gave to the rude, unpolished poetry of these psalms a magic and an effect which the most exalted Puritans rarely found in the songs of their brethren. They were obliged, indeed, to ornament them with all the resources of their imagination. Felton believed he heard the singing of the angel who consoled the three Hebrews in the furnace.

Milady continued:

“But soon the day of our release,
Almighty God, will come;
And if our earthly hope must cease
We'll go to martyrdom!”

This stanza, into which the terrible enchantress tried to throw her whole soul, completed the trouble which had entered

the young officer's heart. He quickly opened the door, and milady saw him appear, pale, as usual, but with his eyes inflamed and almost wild.

"Why do you sing thus, and with such a voice?" said he.

"I crave your pardon, sir," said milady softly; "I forgot that my songs are out of place in this house. I have, perhaps, offended you in your religious beliefs; but it was without meaning to do so, I assure you. Pardon me, then, a fault which is perhaps great, but which certainly was involuntary."

Milady was so beautiful at this moment, the religious ecstasy in which she appeared to be plunged gave such an expression to her countenance, that Felton was dazzled, and fancied he beheld the angel whom just before he thought he heard.

"Yes, yes," said he, "you disturb—you agitate the people who inhabit the castle."

And the poor fanatic was not himself aware of the incoherence of his words, while milady was reading, with her lynx's eyes, the very depths of his heart.

"I will be silent," said milady, casting down her eyes, with all the sweetness she could give to her voice, with all the resignation she could express in her manner.

"No, no, madame," said Felton; "only do not sing so loud, particularly at night."

And at these words Felton, feeling that he could not long maintain his severity toward his prisoner, rushed out of the room.

"You have done right, lieutenant," said the soldier; "her songs disturb the mind; and yet we get accustomed to them, her voice is so beautiful!"

CHAPTER LIV.

THE THIRD DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

FELTON had come, but there was still another step to be taken: he must be retained, or, rather, he must be left quite alone; and milady as yet perceived but dimly the means which could bring her to this result.

Still more must be done: he must be made to speak, in order that she might speak to him; for milady very well knew that her greatest charm was in her voice, which so skilfully ran over the whole gamut of tones, from human speech to celestial language.

And yet, in spite of all this charm, my lady might fail; for Felton was forewarned, even against the least chance. From that moment she watched all his actions, all his words, to the simplest glance of his eyes, to his gestures, even to a respiration that might be interpreted as a sigh; in short, she studied everything like a clever actor, to whom a new part has just been assigned in a line he has not been accustomed to follow.

Toward Lord Winter her plan of conduct was more easy; therefore she had determined on that the evening before. To remain silent and dignified in his presence; from time to time to irritate him by an affected disdain, by a contemptuous word; to provoke him to threats and violence, which would contrast with her own resignation, — such was her plan. Felton would see; perhaps he would say nothing, but he would see.

In the morning Felton came as usual; but milady allowed him to preside over all the preparations for the breakfast without addressing a word to him. Just as he was on the point of retiring she was cheered by a ray of hope, for she thought he was about to speak; but his lips moved without any sound coming from his mouth, and, making a powerful effort over himself, he sent back to his heart the words that were about to escape from his lips, and went out.

Toward noon Lord Winter came in.

It was quite a fine winter's day, and a ray of that pale English sun, which lightens but does not warm, passed through the bars of her prison.

Milady was looking out of the window, and pretended not to hear the door as it opened.

"Ah, ha!" said Lord Winter, "after having played comedy, after having played tragedy, we are now playing melancholy, eh?"

The prisoner made no reply.

"Yes, yes," continued Lord Winter, "I understand — you would like very well to be at liberty on that shore! You would like very well to be in a good ship, plowing the waves of that emerald-green sea; you would like very well, either on land or on the ocean, to lay for me one of those nice little ambuscades you are so skilful in planning. Patience, patience! In a few days the shore will be at your command, the sea will be open to you — more open than will, perhaps, be agreeable to you; for in a few days England will be relieved of your presence."

Milady clasped her hands, and raising her fine eyes toward heaven —

"Lord, Lord!" said she, with an angelic meekness of gesture and tone, "pardon this man, as I myself pardon him!"

"Yes, pray, accursed woman!" cried the baron; "your prayer is so much the more generous from your being, I swear to you, in the power of a man who will never pardon you!"

And he left the room.

At the moment he went out, her piercing glance darted through the half-closed door, and she perceived Felton quickly stepping one side lest he should be seen by her.

Then she threw herself upon her knees, and began to pray.

"My God, my God!" said she, "Thou knowest in what holy cause I suffer; give me, then, the strength to suffer."

The door opened gently; the beautiful suppliant pretended not to hear the noise, and, in a voice broken by tears, she continued:

"God of vengeance! God of goodness! wilt thou allow this man's frightful projects to be accomplished?"

Then only did she feign to hear the sound of Felton's steps, and, rising, quick as thought, she blushed, as if ashamed of being surprised on her knees.

"I do not like to disturb those who pray, madame," said Felton seriously; "do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you."

"How do you know I was praying, sir?" said milady, in a voice choked by sobs. "You were mistaken, sir; I was not praying."

"Do you think, then, madame," replied Felton, in the same serious voice, but in a milder tone, "do you think I assume the right of preventing a creature from prostrating herself before her Creator? God forbid! Besides, repentance is becoming to the guilty. Whatever crimes they may have committed, for me the guilty are sacred at the feet of God!"

"Guilty!—I?" said milady, with a smile which might have disarmed the angel of the last judgment. "Guilty! Oh, my God, thou knowest whether I am guilty! Say I am condemned, sir, if you please; but you know that God, who loves martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned."

"Were you condemned, were you innocent, were you a martyr," replied Felton, "the greater would be the need of prayer; and I myself will aid you with my prayers."

"Oh, you are a just man!" cried milady, throwing herself on her knees at his feet. "I can stand it no longer, for I fear I shall be wanting in strength in the moment at which I shall be forced to undergo the struggle and confess my faith."

Listen, then, to the supplication of a despairing woman. You are made a tool of, sir, but that is not the question; I ask you only one favor, and if you grant it me, I will bless you in this world and in the world to come."

"Speak to the master, madame," said Felton; "happily, I am not charged with the power either of pardoning or punishing; God has laid this responsibility on one higher placed than I am."

"To you — no, to you alone! Listen to me rather than contribute to my destruction, rather than contribute to my ignominy."

"If you have deserved this shame, madame, if you have incurred this ignominy, you must submit to it as an offering to God."

"What do you say? Oh, you do not understand me! When I speak of ignominy, you think I speak of some punishment or other, of imprisonment or death! Would to heaven it were no worse! Of what consequence to me is imprisonment or death?"

"I no longer understand you, madame," said Felton.

"Or, rather, you pretend not to understand me, sir!" replied the prisoner, with a doubting smile.

"No, madame, on the honor of a soldier, on the faith of a Christian."

"What! You are ignorant of Lord Winter's designs on me?"

"I am."

"Impossible! You are his confidant!"

"I never lie, madame."

"Oh, he makes too little concealment of them for you not to guess them."

"I seek to guess nothing, madame; I wait till I am confided in; and, apart from what Lord Winter has said to me before you, he has confided nothing to me."

"Why, then," cried milady, with an incredible accent of truthfulness, "why, then, you are not his accomplice — you do not know that he destines me to a disgrace which all the punishments of the world cannot equal in horror?"

"You are mistaken, madame," said Felton, reddening; "Lord Winter is not capable of such a crime."

"Good!" said milady to herself; "without knowing what it is, he calls it a crime!"

Then aloud:

"The friend of the infamous is capable of everything."

"Whom do you call the infamous?" asked Felton.

"Are there, then, in England two men to whom such an epithet can be applied?"

"You mean George Villiers?" said Felton, and his eyes flashed fire.

"Whom pagans and infidel gentiles call the Duke of Buckingham," replied milady; "I could not have thought that there was an Englishman in all England who would have required so long an explanation to understand of whom I was speaking."

"The hand of the Lord is stretched over him," said Felton; "he will not escape the chastisement he deserves."

Felton only expressed regarding the duke the execration which all the English felt for a man whom the Catholics themselves called the extortioner, the pillager, the profligate, and whom the Puritans styled simply Satan.

"Oh! my God! my God!" cried milady; "when I supplicate thee to pour on this man the chastisement which is his due, thou knowest that I pursue not my own vengeance, but that I pray for the deliverance of a whole nation!"

"Do you know him, then?" asked Felton.

"At length he questions me!" said milady to herself, at the height of joy at having obtained so quickly such a great result. "Oh! do I know him! Yes! to my misfortune, to my eternal misfortune!"

And milady wrung her hands, as if she had reached the very paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt within himself that his strength was deserting him, and he took several steps toward the door; but the prisoner, whose eye was never off him, sprang after him and stopped him.

"Sir," cried she, "be kind, be clement, listen to my prayer; that knife, which the baron's fatal prudence deprived me of, because he knows the use I would make of it,—oh! hear me to the end! That knife—give it to me for a minute only, for mercy's, for pity's sake! I will embrace your knees! You shall shut the door that you may be certain I am not angry with you! My God! the idea of being angry with you, the only just, good, and compassionate being I have met with! You! my savior, perhaps! One minute, that knife, one minute, a single minute, and I will restore it to you through the grating of the door. Only one minute, Mr. Felton, and you will have saved my honor."

"To kill yourself!" cried Felton, in terror forgetting to

withdraw his hands from the hands of the prisoner; "to kill yourself?"

"I have said, sir," murmured milady, lowering her voice and allowing herself to sink overpowered to the ground. "I have told my secret! He knows all! My God, I am lost!"

Felton remained standing, motionless and undecided.

"He still doubts," thought milady; "I have not been sufficiently genuine."

Some one was heard walking in the corridor. Milady recognized Lord Winter's step.

Felton recognized it also, and took a step toward the door.

Milady sprang forward:

"Oh! not a word," said she, in a concentrated voice, "not a word to this man of all I have said to you, or I am lost, and it would be you—you—"

Then, as the steps drew near, she became silent for fear of being heard, applying, with a gesture of infinite terror, her beautiful hand to Felton's mouth.

Felton gently pushed milady from him, and she sank into an easy-chair.

Lord Winter passed before the door without stopping, and they heard the sound of his footsteps in the distance.

Felton, as pale as death, remained some instants with his ear alert and listening; then, when the sound had entirely died away, he breathed like a man awaking from a dream, and rushed out of the apartment.

"Ah!" said milady, listening in her turn to the noise of Felton's steps, which faded away in a direction opposite to Lord Winter's, "ah, at length thou art mine!"

Then her brow darkened.

"If he tells the baron," said she, "I am lost; for the baron, who knows very well that I shall not kill myself, will place me before him with a knife in my hand, and he will discover that all this great despair was only a trick."

She went and stood before the glass, and looked at herself closely. Never had she appeared more beautiful.

"Yes! yes!" said she, smiling, "but he won't tell him!"

In the evening Lord Winter came when the supper was brought.

"Sir," said milady, "is your presence an indispensable accessory of my captivity? Could you not spare me the additional tortures which your visits inflict on me?"

"How now, my dear sister!" said Lord Winter; "did you not sentimentally inform me, with that pretty mouth of yours,

so cruel to me to-day, that you came to England solely for the pleasure of seeing me at your ease, an enjoyment of which you told me you so sensibly felt the privation that you had risked everything for it — seasickness, tempests, captivity? Well, here I am; be satisfied; besides, this time my visit has a motive."

Milady trembled. She thought Felton had told all; perhaps never in her life had this woman, who had experienced so many opposite and powerful emotions, felt her heart beat so violently.

She was seated; Lord Winter took an arm-chair, drew it toward her, and sat down near her; then pulling a paper out of his pocket, he unfolded it slowly.

"Here," said he, "I wanted to show you the kind of passport which I myself have drawn up, and which will serve you henceforward as an order-book in the life I am willing to grant you."

Then, turning his eyes from milady to the paper, he read:

"Order to conduct to —, the name is blank," interrupted Lord Winter; "if you have any preference you may indicate it to me; and if it be not within a thousand leagues of London, attention will be paid to your wishes. I will begin again, then: 'Order to conduct to — the person named Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice of the kingdom of France, but liberated after chastisement; she is to dwell in this place, without ever going more than three leagues from it. In case of any attempt to escape, the penalty of death is to be applied. She will receive five shillings per day for lodging and food.'"

"This order does not concern me," replied milady coldly, "since it bears another name than mine."

"A name! — have you a name?"

"I bear your brother's."

"You are mistaken; my brother is only your second husband, and your first is still living. Tell me his name, and I will put it in the place of the name of Charlotte Backson. No? — you will not? — you are silent? Well, then you must be registered as Charlotte Backson."

Milady remained silent; only this time it was no longer from affectation, but from terror. She believed the order was on the point of being put into execution. She thought that Lord Winter had hastened her departure. She believed she was condemned to start that very evening. Everything, in her mind, was lost for an instant, when suddenly she perceived that no signature was attached to the order.

The joy she felt at this discovery was so great she could not conceal it.

"Yes, yes," said Lord Winter, who perceived what was passing in her mind; "yes, you look for the signature, and you say to yourself, 'All is not lost, for that order is not signed; it is only shown to me to terrify me; that's all.' You are mistaken; to-morrow this order will be sent to the Duke of Buckingham; day after to-morrow it will return signed by his hand and marked with his seal; and twenty-four hours later I will answer for its being put into execution. Farewell, madame; this is all I had to say to you."

"And I reply to you, sir, that this abuse of power, this exile under a false name, is infamous!"

"Would you prefer to be hanged in your true name, milady? You know the English laws are inexorable on the abuse of marriage vows! Speak freely; though my name, or rather my brother's, would be mixed up in the affair, I will risk the scandal of a public trial to make myself certain of getting rid of you."

Milady made no reply.

"Oh! I see you prefer peregrination. That's well, milady; and there is an old proverb that says 'Travelling forms youth.' Faith, you are not wrong, after all; and life is sweet. That's the reason why I take such care you shall not deprive me of mine. There only remains, then, the question of the five shillings to be settled. I seem rather parsimonious — do I not? That's because I don't care to leave you the means of bribing your jailers. Besides, you will always have your charms left to seduce them with. Employ them, if your check with Felton has not disgusted you with temptations of that kind."

"Felton has not told him," said milady to herself; "nothing is lost, then."

"And now, madame, till I see you again. To-morrow I will come and announce to you the departure of my messenger."

Lord Winter rose, saluted milady ironically, and left the room.

Milady breathed again; she had still four days before her. Four days would be sufficient for her to complete the conquest of Felton.

A terrible idea, however, occurred to her. She thought that Lord Winter would, perhaps, send Felton himself to get the order signed by Buckingham. In that case, Felton would

escape her; for, in order to ensure success, the magic of an uninterrupted seduction was necessary.

Nevertheless, as we have said, one circumstance reassured her — Felton had not spoken.

As she did not wish to seem at all agitated by Lord Winter's threats, she took her place at table and ate.

Then, as she had done the evening before, she fell on her knees and repeated her prayers aloud. As on the evening before, the soldier stopped his march to listen to her.

Soon after, she heard lighter steps than the sentinel's coming from the end of the corridor and stopping before her door.

"That is he," said she.

And she began the same religious chant which had so strongly stirred Felton the evening before.

But, though her sweet, full, and sonorous voice vibrated more harmoniously and affectingly than ever, the door remained shut. It seemed, however, to milady that in one of the furtive glances she darted, from time to time, at the small grating she saw the young man's ardent eyes through the narrow opening. But whether this was a reality or not, this time he had sufficient self-control not to enter.

Only, a few instants after she had finished her religious song, milady thought she heard a deep sigh; then the same steps she had heard approach departed slowly, and as though regretfully.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FOURTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

THE next day when Felton entered milady's apartment, he found her standing upon a chair, holding in her hands a cord made of several cambric handkerchiefs torn into strips, twisted together into a kind of rope, and tied at the ends. At the noise Felton made in opening the door, milady leaped lightly to the ground and tried to hide behind her the improvised cord she held in her hand.

The young man was even paler than usual, and his eyes, inflamed by lack of sleep, showed that he had passed a feverish night.

Nevertheless, his brow was armed with a sternness more severe than ever.

He advanced slowly toward milady, who had sat down, and

taking one end of the murderous rope, which, by mistake or perhaps by design, she allowed to appear, —

“What is this, madame?” he asked, coldly.

“This? Nothing,” said milady, smiling with that melancholy expression which she knew so well how to give to her smile; “*ennui* is the mortal enemy of prisoners; I was blue, and I amused myself with twisting a rope.”

Felton turned his eyes toward that part of the wall of the apartment before which he had found milady standing in the chair in which she was now seated, and over her head he perceived a gilt-headed screw, fixed in the wall for the purpose of hanging up clothes or arms.

He started, and the prisoner saw that start; for, though her eyes were cast down, nothing escaped her.

“And what were you doing standing in that chair?” asked he

“What difference does that make to you?” replied milady

“But,” replied Felton, “I wish to know.”

“Do not question me,” said the prisoner; “you know that we true Christians are forbidden to tell falsehoods.”

“Well, then,” said Felton, “I will tell you what you were doing, or rather what you were going to do: you were going to finish the fatal work you cherish in your mind. Remember, madame, if our God forbids us to tell falsehoods, he much more severely forbids suicide.”

“When God sees one of his creatures unjustly persecuted, placed between suicide and dishonor, believe me, sir,” replied milady, in a tone of deep conviction, “God pardons suicide; for then suicide is martyrdom.”

“You say either too much or too little. Speak, madame; in Heaven’s name, explain yourself.”

“Relate my misfortunes to you, for you to treat them as fables; tell you my plans, for you to go and denounce them to my persecutor! No, sir; besides, what difference to you is the life or death of a condemned wretch? You are only responsible for my body, aren’t you? and provided you produce a corpse recognized as mine, they will require no more of you; and perhaps, even, you will have a double reward.”

“I, madame! I!” cried Felton; “to suppose that I would ever accept the price of your life — oh! you cannot think what you say!”

“Let me act as I please, Felton, let me act as I please,” said milady, becoming excited; “every soldier must be ambitious, must he not? You are a lieutenant — well, you will follow my bier with the rank of captain.”

"Now, what have I done to you," said Felton, disturbed, "that you should load me with such a responsibility before God and before men? In a few days you will be away from this place; your life, madame, will then no longer be under my care, and," added he with a sigh, "then you can do what you will with it."

"So," cried milady, as if she could not resist a pious indignation, "you, a religious man, you, who are called a just man, ask but one thing — and that is that you may not be inculpated, annoyed, by my death."

"It is my duty to watch over your life, madame, and I shall watch over it."

"But do you understand the mission you are fulfilling? A sufficiently cruel one if I am guilty, but what name can you give it, what name will the Lord give it, if I am innocent?"

"I am a soldier, madame, and fulfil the orders I have received."

"Do you believe, then, that at the day of judgment God will separate blind executioners from iniquitous judges? You are not willing that I should kill my body, and you make yourself the agent of him who would kill my soul!"

"But I repeat it again to you," replied Felton, in great emotion, "no danger threatens you; I will answer for Lord Winter as for myself."

"Foolish man!" cried milady, "poor foolish man! — venturing to answer for another, when the wisest, when those most after God's own heart, hesitate to answer for themselves; and ranging yourself on the side of the strongest and the most fortunate, to crush the weakest and the most unfortunate."

"Impossible, madame, impossible," murmured Felton, who felt to the bottom of his heart the force of her argument; "a prisoner, you shall not through me recover your liberty; living, you shall not through me lose your life!"

"Yes," cried milady, "but I shall lose what is much dearer to me than life — I shall lose my honor, Felton; and you, you, I make responsible, before God and before men, for my shame and my infamy."

This time Felton, unmoved as he was or appeared to be, could not resist the secret influence which had already taken possession of him; to see such a beautiful woman, fair as the brightest vision, to see her now overcome by grief and now threatening, to undergo at the same time the ascendancy of grief and beauty, was too much for a visionary, too much for a brain weakened by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith, too much

for a heart corroded both by the burning love of heaven and by the devouring hatred of men.

Milady saw his trouble, she felt by intuition the flame of opposing passions which burned the blood in the young fanatic's veins; and, as a skilful general, who, seeing the enemy ready to surrender, marches toward him with a cry of victory, she rose, beautiful as a priestess of old, inspired like a Christian virgin, her arms extended, her throat uncovered, her hair dishevelled, holding with one hand her dress modestly drawn over her bosom, her look illumined by that fire which had already created such disorder in the young Puritan's senses, she stepped toward him, crying out in a vehement melody, and in her sweet voice, to which, on occasion, she could give a terrible accent:

"Let his victim to Baal be sent,
To the lions the martyr be thrown;
Thy God He shall make thee repent;
From th' abyss He'll give ear to my moan."

Felton stood before this strange apparition like one petrified.

"Who art thou? who art thou?" cried he, clasping his hands; "art thou a messenger from God, art thou a minister from hell, art thou an angel or a demon, callest thou thyself Eloa or Astarte?"

"Do you not know me, Felton? I am neither an angel nor a demon, I am a daughter of earth, I am a sister of thy faith, that is all."

"Yes! yes!" said Felton; "I doubted, but now I believe."

"You believe, and still you are an accomplice of that child of Belial, who is called Lord Winter! You believe, and yet you abandon me in the hands of my enemies, of the enemy of England, of the enemy of God! You believe, and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and defiles the world with his heresies and debaucheries, to that infamous Sardanapalus, whom the blind call the Duke of Buckingham, and whom true believers name Antichrist!"

"I deliver you up to Buckingham! I! What mean you by that?"

"They have eyes," cried milady, "but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not."

"Yes! yes!" said Felton, passing his hands over his brow, covered with sweat, as if to remove his last doubt; "yes, I recognize the voice which speaks to me in my dreams; yes, I recognize the features of the angel that appears to me every

night, crying to my soul, which cannot sleep: 'Strike, save England, save thyself, for thou wilt die without having disarmed God!'—'Speak! speak!' cried Felton; "I can understand you now."

A flash of terrible joy, but rapid as thought, gleamed from milady's eyes.

Fugitive as this homicidal flash was, Felton saw it, and started as if its light had revealed the abysses of this woman's heart.

He suddenly recalled Lord Winter's warnings, milady's seductions, her first attempts after her arrival. He drew back a step and hung his head, without ceasing, however, to look at her. As if, fascinated by this strange creature, he could not remove his eyes from hers.

Milady was not a woman to misunderstand the meaning of this hesitation. Under her apparent emotions, her icy coolness never abandoned her. Before Felton replied, and before she would be forced to resume a conversation so difficult to be sustained in the same exalted key, she let her hands fall, and as if the weakness of the woman overpowered the enthusiasm of the inspired fanatic—

"But no," said she, "it is not for me to be the Judith to deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. The sword of the Eternal is too heavy for my arm. Allow me then to avoid dishonor by death, let me take refuge in martyrdom. I do not ask you for liberty, as one who was guilty would, nor for vengeance, as a pagan would. Let me die, that is all. I beg you, I implore you on my knees; let me die, and my last sigh shall be a blessing for my savior."

At her voice, so sweet and beseeching, at her look, so timid and downcast, Felton drew near. Little by little the enchantress had clothed herself with that magic which she assumed and threw aside at will, that is to say, beauty, meekness, and tears, and, above all, the irresistible attraction of mystical voluptuousness, the most consuming of all voluptuousness.

"Alas!" said Felton, "I can do but one thing, and that is to pity you, if you prove to me you are a victim! Lord Winter alleges cruel accusations against you. You are a Christian, you are my sister in religion, I feel myself drawn toward you, I, who have never loved any one but my benefactor, I, who have met with nothing in life but traitors and impious men. But you, madame, so beautiful in reality, you, so pure in appearance, must have committed great iniquities for Lord Winter to pursue you thus."

"They have eyes," repeated milady, with an accent of indescribable grief, "but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not."

"But," cried the young officer, "speak! speak, then!"

"Confide my shame to you!" cried milady, with the blush of modesty in her face; "for often the crime of one becomes the shame of another; confide my shame to you, a man, and I a woman! Oh!" continued she, placing her hand modestly over her beautiful eyes, "never! never!—I could not."

"But to me, to a brother?" said Felton.

Milady looked at him for some time with an expression which the young man took for doubt, but which, however, was nothing but observation, above all the desire to fascinate.

Felton, a suppliant in his turn, clasped his hands.

"Well, then," said milady, "I confide in my brother. I will dare —"

At this moment Lord Winter's steps were heard; but this time milady's terrible brother-in-law did not content himself, as on the preceding day, with passing before the door and going away again. He stopped, exchanged some words with the sentinel, then the door opened and he appeared.

During these few words Felton had quickly drawn back, and when Lord Winter entered he was several paces from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly, casting a scrutinizing glance from milady to the young officer.

"You have been a long time here, John," said he; "has this woman been relating her crimes to you? In that case I can comprehend the length of the conversation."

Felton started, and milady felt she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted Puritan.

"Ah! you fear your prisoner may escape," said she; "well, ask your worthy jailer what favor I was but this instant asking him."

"You were asking a favor?" said the baron suspiciously.

"Yes, my lord," replied the young man, in some confusion.

"And what favor, pray?" asked Lord Winter.

"A knife, which she would return to me, through the grating of the door, a minute after she had received it," replied Felton.

"So there is some one concealed here whose throat this amiable lady is desirous of cutting," said Lord Winter, in his ironical, contemptuous tone.

"There is myself," replied milady.

"I have given you the choice between America and Tyburn," replied Lord Winter; "choose Tyburn, milady; believe me, the cord is more certain than the knife."

Felton grew pale and made a step forward, remembering that at the moment he entered milady had a rope in her hand.

"You are right," said she; "I had already thought of it." Then she added, in a low voice, "I will think of it again."

Felton felt a shudder run to the marrow of his bones; probably Lord Winter perceived his emotion.

"Mistrust yourself, John," said he; "I have placed reliance on you, my friend. Beware—I have warned you! But be of good courage, my lad; in three days we shall be delivered from this creature, and where I shall send her to she can no longer hurt anybody."

"You hear him!" cried milady vehemently, so that the baron might believe she was addressing heaven, and that Felton might understand she was addressing him.

Felton hung his head and seemed buried in thought.

The baron took the young officer by the arm, and kept looking over his own shoulder so as not to lose sight of milady till he had gone out.

"Alas!" said the prisoner, when the door was shut, "I fear I am not so far advanced as I expected. Lord Winter has changed his usual stupidity into a prudence hitherto foreign to him. That's what the desire of vengeance is, and how that desire forms a man! Felton hesitates. Ah! he is not a man like that cursed D'Artagnan. A Puritan only adores virgins, and he adores them by clasping his hands. A musketeer loves women, and he loves them by clasping his arms round them."

Meantime milady waited with great impatience, for she feared the day would pass without her seeing Felton again. At last, an hour after the scene we have just related, she heard some one speaking in a low voice at the door. Soon after the door opened, and she perceived Felton.

The young man advanced into the room with a quick step, leaving the door open behind him, and making a sign to milady to be silent. His face was much agitated.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"Listen," replied Felton, in a low voice; "I have just sent away the sentinel, that I might remain here without any one knowing I had come to speak to you, without having what I say to you overheard by others. The baron has just related a frightful story to me."

Milady assumed her smile of a victim resigned, and shook her head.

"Either you are a demon," continued Felton, "or the baron, my benefactor, my father, is a monster. I have known you four days, I have loved him two years. I therefore may hesitate between you; but be not alarmed at what I say, I need to be convinced. To-night, after twelve, I will come to see, and you will convince me."

"No, Felton, no, my brother, the sacrifice is too great, and I feel what it must cost you. No, I am lost; do not be lost with me. My death will be much more eloquent than my life, and the silence of the corpse will convince you much better than the prisoner's words."

"Be silent, madame," cried Felton, "and do not speak to me in this way. I came to entreat you to promise me on your honor, to swear to me by what you hold most sacred, that you will make no attempt on your life."

"I will not promise," said milady, "for no one has more respect for a promise or an oath than I have, and if I made a promise I should have to keep it."

"Well," said Felton, "only promise till after you have seen me again. If, when you have seen me again, you still persist — well, then you shall be free, and I myself will give you the weapon you asked me for."

"Well," said milady, "for your sake I will wait."

"Swear it."

"I swear I will, by our God. Are you satisfied?"

"I am," said Felton; "till night, then."

And he darted out of the room, shut the door, and waited in the corridor, the soldier's half-pike in his hand, and as if he had mounted guard in his place.

When the soldier returned, Felton gave him back his weapon.

Then, through the grating to which she had come, milady saw the young man cross himself with a delirious fervor, and go down the corridor in an apparent transport of joy.

She herself returned to her place with a smile of savage contempt on her lips, and repeated, blaspheming, that terrible name of God, by whom she had just sworn without ever having learned to know Him.

"My God!" said she, "what an insane fanatic! My God. I shall avenge myself, and he will help me!"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FIFTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

MILADY had achieved a half-triumph, and the success obtained doubled her strength.

It was not a difficult thing to conquer, as she had hitherto done, men who were quick to let themselves be seduced, and whom the gallant education of a court led readily into her snares. Milady was handsome enough not to find resistance on the part of the flesh, and she was clever enough to prevail over all the obstacles of the mind.

But this time she had to contend with an uncultivated nature, concentrated and insensible by dint of austerity. Religion and penance had made Felton a man inaccessible to ordinary seductions. In his heated brain fermented plans so vast, projects so tumultuous, that no room remained for any capricious or material love, that sentiment which feeds on leisure and grows by corruption. Milady therefore had made a breach, with her false virtue, in the opinion of a man horribly prejudiced against her, and with her beauty in the heart of a man hitherto chaste and pure. In short, by this experiment, made upon the most rebellious subject that nature and religion could submit to her study, she had acquired a knowledge of her own resources hitherto unknown to herself.

Many times nevertheless, during the evening, she despaired of fate and of herself. She did not invoke God, we know, but she had faith in the genius of evil, that immense sovereignty which reigns in all the details of human life, and by which, as in the Arabian fable, a single pomegranate seed is sufficient to reconstruct a ruined world.

Milady, being well prepared for Felton's reception, was able to erect her batteries for the next day. She knew she had only two days left; that when once the order was signed by Buckingham — and Buckingham would sign it the more readily from its bearing a false name, and because he could not, therefore, recognize the woman in question — when once this order was signed, we say, the baron would make her embark immediately, and she knew also that women condemned to transportation employ arms much less powerful in their seductions than pretendedly virtuous women whose beauty is illuminated by the sun of society, whose kind the voice of fashion lauds, and whom a halo of aristocracy gilds with its magic splendors.

To be a woman condemned to a painful and infamous punishment does not prevent her from being beautiful, but it is an obstacle to the regaining of power. Like all persons of real genius, milady knew what suited her nature and her means. Poverty was destruction to her — degradation took away two-thirds of her greatness. Milady was a queen only among queens. The pleasure of satisfied pride was necessary for her domination. To command inferior beings was rather a humiliation than a pleasure for her.

She should certainly return from her exile — she did not doubt that a single instant. But how long might this exile last? For an active, ambitious nature, like milady's, days not spent in climbing are days of ill omen! What word, then, can be found to describe those days when they are descending? To lose a year, two years, three years, that is to say, an eternity, to return when D'Artagnan and his friends, happy and triumphant, should have received from the queen the reward they had deserved by the services they had rendered her, — these were devouring ideas which a woman like milady could not endure. Besides, the storm raging within her doubled her strength, and she would have burst the walls of her prison if her body could for a single instant have assumed the proportions of her mind.

Then what spurred her on still more in the midst of all this was the remembrance of the cardinal. What must the mistrustful, restless, suspicious cardinal think of her silence; the cardinal, not merely her only support, her only prop, her only protector in the present, but, still further, the principal instrument of her future fortune and vengeance? She knew him — she knew that on her return after a fruitless journey it would be idle to allege her imprisonment as an excuse, idle to enlarge on the sufferings she had undergone. The cardinal would reply, with the sarcastic calmness of the sceptic, strong at once by power and genius:

“You should not have allowed yourself to be taken.”

Then milady collected all her energies, murmuring in the depths of her soul the name of Felton, the only beam of light penetrating to her in the depths of the hell into which she was fallen, and, like a serpent which folds and unfolds its rings to ascertain its strength, she enveloped Felton beforehand in the thousand meshes of her inventive imagination.

Meanwhile the time was passing. The hours, one after another, seemed to awaken the bell as they passed, and every blow of the brazen hammer resounded on the prisoner's heart.

At nine o'clock Lord Winter made his usual visit, examined the window and the bars, sounded the floor and the walls, looked to the chimney and the doors, but, during this long and minute examination, neither he nor milady uttered a single word.

Doubtless both of them understood that the situation had become too serious to waste time in idle words and ineffectual anger.

"Well," said the baron, on leaving her, "you will not escape for one more night!"

At ten o'clock Felton came and placed the sentinel. Milady recognized his step. She was as well acquainted with it now as a mistress is with the footfall of the lover of her heart, and yet milady at the same time detested and despised this weak fanatic.

It was not the appointed hour — Felton did not come in.

Two hours after, as the clock struck twelve, the sentinel was relieved.

This time it was the hour, and from this moment milady waited impatiently.

The new sentinel began his walk in the corridor.

At the end of ten minutes Felton came. Milady was all attention.

"Listen," said the young man to the sentinel; "on no pretence leave the door, for you know that last night my lord punished a soldier for quitting his post for an instant, though I watched in his place during his absence."

"Yes, I know he did," said the soldier.

"I recommend you, therefore, to keep the strictest watch. I am going to pay a second visit to this woman, who, I fear, entertains sinister intentions on her own life, and I have received orders to watch her."

"Good!" murmured milady; "here's the austere Puritan telling a lie!"

The soldier only smiled.

"Plague take it, lieutenant," said he, "you are not very unlucky in being charged with such commissions, particularly if my lord has authorized you to look in her bed!"

Felton reddened. In any other circumstances he would have reprimanded the soldier for indulging in such a joke, but his conscience murmured too loud for his mouth to dare to speak.

"If I call, come in," said he; "if any one comes, call me."

"I will, lieutenant," said the soldier.

Felton entered milady's apartment. Milady arose.

"So here you are!" said she.

"I promised you I would come," said Felton, "and I have come."

"You promised me something else."

"What? My God!" said the young man, who, in spite of his self-command, felt his knees tremble and the sweat start from his brow.

"You promised to bring a knife, and to leave it with me after our conversation."

"Say no more of that, madame," said Felton; "there is no situation, however terrible, that can authorize one of God's creatures to inflict death upon itself. I have reflected that I could never become guilty of such a sin."

"Ah! you have reflected!" said the prisoner, sitting down in her arm-chair with a smile of disdain; "and I also have reflected!"

"About what?"

"That I can have nothing to say to a man who does not keep his word."

"Oh! my God!" murmured Felton.

"You may retire," said milady; "I shall not speak."

"Here is the knife!" said Felton, drawing from his pocket the weapon which, according to his promise, he had brought, but which he hesitated to give to his prisoner.

"Let me see it," said milady.

"For what purpose?"

"On my honor I will instantly return it to you; you shall place it on that table, and you may remain between it and me."

Felton handed the weapon to milady, who examined the temper of it attentively, and tried the point on the tip of her finger.

"Well," said she, returning the knife to the young officer, "this is fine and good steel; you are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took back the weapon and laid it on the table, in accordance with his agreement with his prisoner.

Milady followed him with her eyes, and made a gesture of satisfaction.

"Now," said she, "listen to me."

The recommendation was useless. The young officer was standing before her, awaiting her words as if to devour them.

"Felton," said milady, with a solemnity full of melancholy, "if your sister, your father's daughter, said to you:

"While still young, unfortunately beautiful, I was dragged into a snare. I resisted. Ambushes, acts of violence were

multiplied around me. I resisted. The religion I serve, the God I adore, were blasphemed because I called to my aid my religion and my God. I resisted. Then outrages were heaped upon me, and when they could not ruin my soul they determined to defile my body forever. Finally—”

Milady stopped, and a bitter smile passed over her lips.

“Finally,” said Felton, “finally, what did they do?”

“Finally, one evening, they resolved to paralyze my unconquerable resistance. One evening a powerful narcotic was mixed with my water. Scarcely had I finished my repast when I felt myself sink by degrees into a strange torpor. Though I was without suspicion, a vague fear seized me, and I tried to struggle against sleep. I arose. I endeavored to run to the window and call for help, but my legs refused to carry me. It seemed as if the ceiling were sinking down on my head, and crushing me under its weight. I stretched out my arms, I tried to speak; I could only utter inarticulate sounds. An irresistible faintness came over me. I supported myself by an arm-chair, feeling that I was about to fall, but this support was soon insufficient for my weak arms. I fell on one knee, then on both. I tried to pray, but my tongue was frozen. God, doubtless, neither heard nor saw me, and I sank down on the floor, a prey to a sleep which was like death.

“Of all that passed during my sleep, or the time that glided away while it lasted, I have no recollection. The only thing I recollect is, that I woke in bed, in a round chamber, the furniture of which was sumptuous, and into which light penetrated only by an opening in the ceiling. Moreover no door seemed to give entrance to the room. It might have been called a magnificent prison.

“It was long before I could make out where I was, or could take account of the details I describe. My mind seemed to strive in vain to shake off the heavy darkness of the sleep from which I could not rouse myself. I had vague perceptions of a space travelled over, of the rolling of a carriage, of a horrible dream, in which my strength was exhausted; but all this was so dark and so indistinct in my mind that these events seemed to belong to another life than mine, and yet mixed with mine by a fantastic duality.

“For some time, the state into which I had fallen appeared so strange, that I thought I was dreaming. I arose tremblingly; my clothes were near me on a chair. I neither remembered having undressed myself, nor going to bed. Then, little by little, the reality broke upon me, full of chaste terrors. I was

no longer in the house where I had been dwelling. As well as I could judge by the light of the sun, the day was already two-thirds gone. It was the evening before that I had fallen asleep; my sleep then must have already lasted nearly twenty-four hours! What had happened during this long sleep?

"I dressed myself as quickly as possible. My slow and stiff motions all attested that the effects of the narcotic were still not entirely dissipated. The chamber was evidently furnished for a woman's reception; and the most finished coquette could not have formed a wish which, on looking round the apartment, she would not have found gratified.

"Certainly I was not the first captive who had been shut up in this splendid prison. But you understand, Felton, the more superb the prison, the greater was my terror.

"Yes, it was a prison, for I vainly tried to get out of it. I sounded all the walls in the hopes of discovering a door, but everywhere the walls returned a full, dull sound.

"I made the circuit of the room perhaps twenty times, in search of an outlet of some kind; there was none. I sank exhausted with fatigue and terror into an arm-chair.

"In the meantime night was rapidly coming on, and with night my terrors increased. I did not know but I had best remain where I was seated. I seemed to be surrounded by unknown dangers, into which I was likely to fall at every step. Although I had eaten nothing since the evening before, my fears prevented me from feeling hungry.

"No noise from without, by which I could measure the time, reached me. I only supposed it might be seven or eight o'clock in the evening, for it was October and quite dark.

"All at once a door, creaking on its hinges, made me start. A globe of fire appeared above the glazed opening of the ceiling, casting a strong light into my chamber, and I perceived with terror that a man was standing within a few paces of me.

"A table, with two covers, bearing a supper ready prepared, stood, as if by magic, in the middle of the apartment.

"That man was he who had pursued me during a whole year; who had vowed my dishonor, and who, by the first words that issued from his mouth, gave me to understand he had accomplished it the preceding night."

"The scoundrel!" murmured Felton.

"Oh, yes, the scoundrel!" cried milady, seeing the interest which the young officer, whose soul seemed to hang on her lips, took in her strange story. "Oh, yes, the scoundrel! He believed that, by having triumphed over me in my sleep, all

was completed. He came hoping that I should accept my shame, since my shame was consummated. He came to offer his fortune in exchange for my love.

"All the haughty contempt and disdainful words that the heart of a woman can contain I poured out upon this man. Doubtless he was accustomed to such reproaches, for he listened to me calm and smiling, with his arms folded over his breast. Then, when he thought I had said all, he advanced toward me. I sprang to the table, I seized a knife, I placed it to my breast.

"'Take one step more,' said I, 'and, in addition to my dishonor, you shall have my death to reproach yourself with!'

"Unquestionably there was in my look, my voice, my whole person, such sincerity of gesture, of attitude and action, as carries conviction to the most perverse minds, for he stopped.

"'Your death!' said he; 'oh, no, you are too charming a mistress to allow me to consent to lose you thus, after having had the good fortune to have you once in my possession. Good-by, my charmer; I will defer paying you my next visit till you are in a better humor.'

"At these words he blew a whistle. The globe of fire which lighted the room reascended and disappeared. I found myself again in complete darkness. The same noise of the door opening and shutting was repeated the instant after, the flaming globe descended again, and I was alone.

"That moment was frightful. If I had still any doubts of my misfortune, these doubts had vanished in an overwhelming reality. I was in the hands of a man whom I not only detested, but despised; of a man capable of anything, and who had already given me a fatal proof of what it was in his power to do."

"But, pray, who was this man?" asked Felton.

"I spent the night in a chair, starting at the least noise; for about midnight the lamp went out, and I again was in darkness. But the night passed without any fresh attempt on the part of my persecutor. Day came — the table had disappeared, only I had still the knife in my hand.

"That knife was my only hope.

"I was worn out with fatigue; lack of sleep inflamed my eyes; I had not dared to sleep a single instant. The light of day reassured me. I went and threw myself on the bed, without parting with the emanipating knife, which I concealed under my pillow.

"When I awoke, another meal was served.

"This time, in spite of my terrors, in spite of my agony, I began to feel a devouring hunger. It was forty-eight hours since I had taken any nourishment. I ate some bread and some fruit; then, remembering the narcotic mixed with the water I had drunk, I did not touch that which was placed on the table, but filled my glass at a marble fountain fixed in the wall over my dressing-table.

"And yet, in spite of this precaution, I remained for some time still in a terrible agitation of mind. But this time my fears were unfounded; I spent the day without experiencing anything like what I dreaded.

"I took the precaution to half empty the carafe so that my suspicions might not be noticed.

"The evening came on, and with it darkness; but deep as this darkness was, my eyes began to be accustomed to it; I saw the table sink through the floor. A quarter of an hour after, it appeared again, bearing my supper. And in an instant, thanks to the same lamp, my chamber was once more lighted.

"I was determined to eat only such things as could not possibly have anything soporific introduced into them; two eggs and some fruit composed my repast. Then I drew another glass of water from my protecting fountain, and drank it.

"After swallowing a mouthful or two it seemed to me not to have the same taste as in the morning. A swift suspicion instantly seized me — I stopped, but I had already drunk half a glassful of it.

"I threw the rest away with horror, and waited, with the dew of fear on my brow.

"No doubt some invisible witness had seen me draw the water from that fountain, and had taken advantage of my very confidence in it, the better to assure my ruin so coolly resolved upon, so cruelly pursued.

"Half an hour had not passed when the same symptoms began to appear; only, as I had drunk but half a glass of the water, I struggled longer, and, instead of falling entirely asleep, I sank into a state of lethargy, which left me a perception of what was happening around me, while it deprived me of the strength either to defend myself or to fly.

"I dragged myself toward the bed, to seek the only defence left me — my saving knife; but I could not reach the bolster; I sank on my knees, my hands clasped round one of the bed-posts; then I realized that I was lost."

Felton became frightfully pale, and a convulsive shudder crept through his whole body.

"And what was most terrible," continued milady, with altered voice, as if she still experienced the same agony as at that awful moment, "was that this time I retained a consciousness of the danger threatening me, was that my soul, so to speak, was still awake in my sleeping body, was that I saw, was that I heard! It is true that all was like a dream, but it was only the more frightful.

"I saw the lamp ascending and gradually leaving me in darkness; then I heard the creaking of the door so well known, though I had heard it open but twice.

"I felt instinctively that some one was approaching me. It is said that the doomed wretch in the deserts of America thus feels the approach of the serpent.

"I strove to make an effort, I tried to cry out; by an incredible effort of will I even raised myself up, but only to sink down again immediately, and to sink down into my persecutor's arms."

"Tell me, pray, who this man was!" cried the young officer.

Milady saw at a single glance all the painful feelings which she inspired in Felton by dwelling on every detail of her recital. But she would not spare him a single pang. The more profoundly she wounded his heart, the more certain he would be to avenge her; so she went on as if she had not heard his exclamation, or as if she thought the moment was not yet come to reply to it.

"Only this time it was no longer a kind of inert corpse, without feeling, that the villain had to deal with. I told you, without being able to regain the complete exercise of my faculties I retained the sense of my danger. I struggled, then, with all my strength, and, weak as I was, doubtless opposed a long resistance, for I heard him cry out:

"'These miserable Puritan girls! I knew very well that they tired out their executioners, but I thought them less strong against their lovers!'

"Alas! my desperate resistance could not last long; I felt my strength fail, and this time it was not my sleep that enabled the scoundrel to prevail, but my swooning."

Felton listened without making any sound but a kind of suppressed roar. Only the sweat streamed down his marble brow, and his hand, under his coat, tore his breast.

"My first impulse, on coming to myself, was to feel under my pillow for the knife I had not been able to reach. If it had not come into play for defence, it might at least serve in expiation.

"But on taking that knife, Felton, a terrible idea occurred to me. I have sworn to tell you all, and I will tell you all. I promised you the truth — I will tell it, though it destroy me."

"The idea came into your mind to avenge yourself on that man, did it not?" cried Felton.

"It certainly did!" said milady. "The idea was not a Christian one, I know; but undoubtedly that eternal enemy of our souls, that lion roaring constantly around us, breathed it into my mind. In short, what shall I say to you, Felton?" continued milady, in the tone of a woman accusing herself of a crime. "This idea occurred to me, and did not leave me. I am to-day bearing the punishment of that homicidal thought."

"Go on! go on!" said Felton; "I am eager to see you come to your vengeance!"

"Oh, I resolved that it should take place as soon as possible. I had no doubt he would return the following night. During the day I had nothing to fear.

"When the breakfast hour came, therefore, I did not hesitate to eat and drink. I determined to make believe sup, but to take nothing; so by the nourishment of the morning, I was to combat the fast of the evening.

"Only I concealed a glass of water, which formed part of my breakfast, thirst having made me suffer the most, when I had remained forty-eight hours without eating or drinking.

"The day passed without having any other influence on me than to strengthen the resolution I had formed, only I took care that my face should not betray the slightest thoughts of my heart, for I had no doubt I was watched. Several times, even, I felt a smile on my lips. Felton, I dare not tell you at what idea I smiled; you would hold me in horror —"

"Go on! go on!" said Felton; "you see plainly that I listen, and that I am anxious to know the end."

"Evening came, the ordinary events took place. During the darkness, as before, my table was covered, then the lamp was lighted and I sat down to table. I ate some fruit only. I pretended to pour out water from the carafe, but I drank only what I had saved in my glass. Moreover, the substitution was made so carefully that my spies, if I had any, could have no suspicion of it.

"After supper I exhibited the same marks of languor as on the preceding evening. But this time, as if I yielded to fatigue, or as if I had become familiarized with danger, I dragged myself toward my bed, let my dress fall, and got in.

"I found my knife where I had placed it, under my pillow, and, while feigning to sleep, my hand convulsively grasped the handle of it.

"Two hours passed without anything new occurring. This time — oh, my God! who could have told me that the evening before! — I began to fear he would not come!

"At length I saw the lamp rising softly, and disappearing in the depths of the ceiling. My room was filled with darkness and obscurity, but I made an effort to see through this darkness and obscurity.

"Nearly ten minutes passed; I heard no other noise but the beating of my own heart.

"I implored heaven that he might come.

"At length I heard the well-known noise of the door opening and shutting. In spite of the thickness of the carpet, I heard a step which made the floor creak. In spite of the darkness, I saw a shadow approaching my bed."

"Make haste! make haste!" said Felton; "do you not see that every one of your words burns me like molten lead!"

"Then," continued milady, "I collected all my strength, I recalled to my mind that the moment of vengeance, or, rather, of justice, had struck. I looked upon myself as another Judith. I gathered myself up, knife in hand, and when I saw him near me, stretching out his arms to find his victim, then, with a last cry of agony and despair, I struck him in the middle of his breast.

"The scoundrel! He had foreseen all! His breast was covered with a coat of mail; the edge of the knife was turned.

"'Ah! ha!' cried he, seizing my arm, and wresting from me the weapon that had served me so ill, 'you want to take my life, do you, my pretty Puritan! But this is more than dislike, this is ingratitude! Come, come, calm yourself, my sweet girl! I thought you were become kinder. I am not one of those tyrants who detain women by force. You don't love me. With my usual fatuity, I doubted it; now I am convinced. To-morrow you shall be free.

"I had but one wish, and that was that he should kill me.

"'Beware!' said I, 'for my liberty is your dishonor.'

"'Explain yourself, my pretty sibyl.'

"'Yes; for no sooner shall I have left this place than I will tell everything. I will proclaim the violence you have used toward me. I will describe my captivity. I will denounce this palace of infamy. You are placed very high, my lord,

but tremble! Above you there is the king. Above the king there is God!’

“Perfect master as he seemed over himself, my persecutor allowed a movement of anger to escape him. I could not see the expression of his face, but I felt the arm on which my hand was placed tremble.

“‘Then you shall not go from here,’ said he.

“‘Very well,’ cried I, ‘then the place of my punishment will be also my tomb. So be it, I will die here, and you will see if an accusing phantom is not more terrible than a living being who threatens!’

“‘No weapon shall be left in your hands.’

“‘There is a weapon which despair has placed within reach of every creature that has the courage to make use of it. I will allow myself to die of hunger.’

“‘Come, come,’ said the wretch, ‘is not peace much better than such a war? I will restore you to liberty this moment. I will proclaim you a piece of immaculate virtue. I will name you the Lucretia of England.’

“‘And I will say that you are the Sextus; I will denounce you before men as I have even now denounced you before God; and if it be necessary that, like Lucretia, I should sign my accusation with my blood, I will sign it.’

“‘Ah, ha!’ said my enemy, in a jeering tone, ‘that’s quite another thing. Faith! everything considered, you are very well off here. You shall want for nothing, and if you choose to die of hunger — why, that will be your own fault.’

“At these words he retired. I heard the door open and shut, and I remained overwhelmed, yet less, I confess, by my grief than by the shame of not having avenged myself.

“He kept his word. All that day, all the next night, passed away without my seeing him. But I also kept my word with him, and I neither ate nor drank. I was, as I had told him, determined to starve myself to death.

“I passed the day and the night in prayer, for I hoped that God would pardon me my suicide.

“The second night the door opened. I was lying on the floor, for my strength was beginning to abandon me.

“At the noise I raised myself up on one hand.

“‘Well,’ said a voice which vibrated in too terrible a manner in my ear not to be recognized; ‘well, are we softened a little, will we not pay for our liberty by the mere promise of silence? Come, I am a good sort of a prince,’ added he, ‘and though I do not like Puritans, I do them justice, as well as

Puritan women when they are pretty. Come, take a little oath for me on the cross; I won't ask anything more of you.'

"'On the cross!' cried I, rising up, for at that abhorred voice I had recovered all my strength; 'on the cross, I swear th. . no promise, no threat, no force, no torture, shall close my mouth. On the cross, I swear to denounce you everywhere as a murderer, as a despoiler of honor, as a base coward. On the cross, I swear, if I ever succeed in escaping from this place, to call down vengeance on you from the whole human race.'

"'Beware!' said the voice, in a threatening accent that I had never yet heard; 'I have one supreme means, which I will not employ except in the last extremity, to close your mouth, or at least to prevent any one from believing a single word you may utter.'

"I mustered all my strength to reply to him with a burst of laughter.

"He saw that it was an eternal war, a war to the death, between us from that time forth.

"'Listen,' said he; 'I give you the rest of this night and all to-morrow. Reflect, promise to be silent, and riches, consideration, even honor, shall surround you. Threaten to speak, and I will condemn you to infamy.'

"'You,' cried I, 'you!'

"'To eternal, ineffaceable infamy!'

"'You,' repeated I. Oh! I declare to you, Felton, I thought him mad!

"'Yes, I!' replied he.

"'Oh! leave me,' said I; 'begone, if you do not wish to see me dash my head against that wall, before your eyes!'

"'Very well!' replied he. 'It is your own doing. Till to-morrow evening, then!'

"'Till to-morrow evening,' I repeated, allowing myself to fall, and biting the carpet with rage."

Felton leaned for support on a piece of furniture, and milady saw, with a demon's joy, that his strength would fail him, perhaps before the end of her recital.

CHAPTER LVII.

A DEVICE OF CLASSICAL TRAGEDY.

AFTER a moment's silence, employed by milady in observing the young man who was listening to her, milady continued her recital.

"It was nearly three days since I had eaten or drunk anything. I was suffering frightful torments. At times there passed before me something like clouds compressing my brow, veiling my eyes. It was delirium.

"When evening came I was so weak that every instant I fainted, and every time that I fainted I thanked God, for I thought I was going to die.

"In the midst of one of these fainting fits, I heard the door open. Terror recalled me to myself.

"He entered the apartment, followed by a man in a mask. He himself was masked, but I knew his step, I knew his voice, I knew him by that imposing carriage which hell bestowed on his person for the curse of humanity.

"'Well,' said he to me, 'have you made up your mind to take the oath I requested of you?'

"'You have said Puritans have but one word. Mine you have heard, and that is to pursue you on earth before the tribunal of men, in heaven before the tribunal of God.'

"'You persist, then?'

"'I swear it before the God who hears me. I will take the whole world as a witness of your crime, and that until I have found an avenger.'

"'You are a prostitute,' said he, in a voice of thunder, 'and you shall undergo the punishment of prostitutes! Disgraced in the eyes of the world you will invoke, try to prove to that world that you are neither guilty nor mad!'

"Then, addressing the man who accompanied him :

"'Executioner,' said he, 'do your duty.'

"Oh! his name, his name!" cried Felton; "tell it me!"

"Then, in spite of my cries, in spite of my resistance, for I began to realize that for me there was a question of something worse than death, the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor, bruised me with his rough grasp. Suffocated by sobs, almost without consciousness, invoking God, who did not listen to me, I suddenly uttered a frightful cry of pain and

shame. A burning fire, a red-hot iron, the iron of the executioner, was imprinted on my shoulder."

Felton uttered a groan.

"Here," said milady, rising with the majesty of a queen, "here, Felton, behold the new martyrdom invented for a young girl, pure, and yet the victim of a scoundrel's brutality. Learn to know the hearts of men, and henceforth make yourself less easily the instrument of their unjust revenges."

Milady, with a swift gesture, opened her dress, tore the cambric that covered her bosom, and, red with feigned anger and simulated modesty, showed the young man the ineffaceable impression which dishonored her beautiful shoulder.

"But," cried Felton, "it is a fleur-de-lis which I see there."

"And therein consisted the infamy," replied milady. "The brand of England!—it would have been necessary to prove what tribunal had imposed it on me, and I could have made a public appeal to all the tribunals of the kingdom; but the brand of France!—oh! by that, by that I was branded indeed!"

This was too much for Felton.

Pale, motionless, overwhelmed by this frightful revelation, dazzled by the superhuman beauty of this woman, who unveiled herself before him with a shamelessness which appeared to him sublime, he ended by falling on his knees before her, as the early Christians did before those pure and holy martyrs whom the persecution of the emperors gave up in the circus to the blood-thirsty lewdness of the populace. The brand disappeared, the beauty alone remained.

"Pardon! pardon!" cried Felton; "oh! pardon!"

Milady read in his eyes, "Love! love!"

"Pardon for what?" asked she.

"Pardon me for having joined your persecutors."

Milady held out her hand to him.

"So beautiful! so young!" cried Felton, covering that hand with his kisses.

Milady cast on him one of those looks which make a slave into a king.

Felton was a Puritan. He dropped this woman's hand to kiss her feet.

He more than loved her, he adored her.

When this crisis was past; when milady seemed to have recovered her self-control, which she had not lost even for an instant; when Felton had seen her cover again with the veil of chastity those treasures of love which were concealed from him only to make him desire them the more ardently.—

"Ah! now," said he, "I have only one thing to ask of you: that is, the name of your true executioner. For in my eyes there is but one. The other was the instrument, that was all."

"What, brother!" cried milady; "must I name him, have you not yet divined who he is?"

"What!" cried Felton; "he!—he again!—he always! What!—the real culprit!"

"The real culprit," said milady, "is the ravager of England, the persecutor of true believers, the cowardly ravisher of the honor of so many women, he who, to satisfy a caprice of his corrupt heart, is about to make England shed so much blood, who protects the Protestants to-day and will betray them to-morrow—"

"Buckingham! Then it is Buckingham!" cried Felton, in exasperation.

Milady hid her face in her hands, as if she could not endure the shame which this name recalled to her.

"Buckingham, the executioner of this angelic creature!" cried Felton. "And Thou hast not hurled thy thunder at him, my God! and Thou hast left him noble, honored, powerful, for the ruin of us all!"

"God abandons him who abandons himself," said milady.

"But He will draw down on his head the punishment reserved for the damned!" said Felton, with increasing excitement; "He wishes that human vengeance should precede heavenly justice."

"Men fear him and spare him."

"I!" said Felton, "I do not fear him, nor will I spare him!"

Milady felt her soul bathed in a hellish joy.

"But how can Lord Winter, my protector, my father," asked Felton, "be mixed up with all this?"

"Listen, Felton," resumed milady; "because by the side of base and contemptible men, there are often found great and generous natures. I had an affianced husband, a man whom I loved, and who loved me; a heart like yours, Felton, a man like you. I went to him and told him all; he knew me, that man did, and did not doubt an instant. He was a nobleman, a man equal to Buckingham in every respect. He said nothing, he only girded on his sword, enveloped himself in his cloak, and went straight to Buckingham Palace."

"Yes, yes," said Felton; "I understand; though with such men not the sword, but the dagger, should be used."

"Buckingham had left England the day before, sent as ambassador to Spain, to demand the hand of the Infanta for king Charles I., who was then only Prince of Wales. My affianced husband returned.

"*'Hear me,'* said he; *'that man has gone, and has therefore, for the moment, escaped my vengeance, but meanwhile let us be united, as we were to have been! Then leave Lord Winter to maintain his own honor and his wife's.'*"

"Lord Winter!" cried Felton.

"Yes," said milady, "Lord Winter; and now you can understand it all, can you not? Buckingham was absent nearly a year. A week before his return Lord Winter died suddenly, leaving me his sole heir. Whence came the blow? God who knows all doubtless knows this, but I accuse no one."

"Oh! what an abyss! what an abyss!" cried Felton.

"Lord Winter died without revealing anything to his brother. The terrible secret was to be concealed from all till it burst, like a thunder-clap, over the head of the guilty one. Your protector had regretfully seen his elder brother's marriage with a portionless girl. I felt that I could look for no support from a man disappointed in his hopes of an inheritance. I went to France, intending to remain there for the rest of my life. But all my fortune is in England. Communication being closed by the war, I was in want of everything. So I was obliged to come back again. Six days ago I landed at Portsmouth."

"Well?" said Felton.

"Well. Buckingham heard by some means, no doubt, of my return. He spoke of me to Lord Winter, already prejudiced against me, and told him that his sister-in-law was a prostitute, a branded woman. My husband's voice, pure and noble, was no longer there to defend me. Lord Winter believed all that was told him, with so much the more facility because it was his interest to believe it. He had me arrested, brought me here, and placed me under your guard. You know the rest. Day after to-morrow he banishes me, he transports me. Day after to-morrow he exiles me among the infamous. Oh! the net is well woven, the plot is clever, and my honor will not survive it! You see, then, Felton, I must die! Felton, give me that knife!"

And at these words, as if all her strength was exhausted, milady sank, weak and languishing, into the arms of the young officer, who, intoxicated with love, anger, and hitherto unknown sensations of delight, held her with transport, pressed

her to his heart, all trembling at the breath from her lovely mouth, bewildered by the contact with her palpitating bosom.

"No, no," said he; "no, you shall live honored and pure, you shall live to triumph over your enemies."

Milady slowly pushed him from her with her hand, while drawing him nearer with her look. But Felton embraced her more closely, imploring her as though she were a divinity.

"Oh, death! death!" said she, lowering her voice and her eyelids; "oh, death rather than shame! Felton, my brother, my friend, I conjure you!"

"No," cried Felton, "no; you shall live, and you shall be avenged."

"Felton, I bring misfortune to all who surround me! Felton, abandon me! Felton, let me die!"

"Well, then, we will die together!" cried he, pressing his lips to the prisoner's.

Several knocks resounded on the door. This time milady really pushed him away from her.

"Hark!" said she; "we have been overheard; some one is coming! All is over! we are lost!"

"No," said Felton; "it is only the sentinel warning me that they are about to change guard."

"Then run to the door and open it yourself."

Felton obeyed; this woman was already his whole thought, his whole soul.

He found a sergeant in command of a watch patrol.

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the young lieutenant.

"You told me to open the door if I heard any one cry out," said the soldier; "but you forgot to leave me the key. I heard you cry out without understanding what you said. I tried to open the door, but it was locked inside; then I called the sergeant."

"And here I am," said the sergeant.

Felton, bewildered, almost mad, stood speechless.

Milady, perceiving that it was now her turn to come forward, ran to the table, and seizing the knife which Felton had laid down, —

"And what right have you to prevent me from dying?" said she.

"Great God!" exclaimed Felton, on seeing the knife glitter in her hand.

At that moment a burst of ironical laughter resounded through the corridor. Attracted by the noise, the baron, in his

dressing-gown, his sword under his arm, was standing in the doorway.

"Ah! ha!" said he; "here we are, at the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has gone through all the phases I named. But be at ease, no blood will flow."

Milady perceived that all was lost unless she gave Felton an instant and terrible proof of her courage.

"You are mistaken, my lord; blood will flow, and may that blood fall back on those who cause it to flow!"

Felton uttered a cry, and rushed toward her. He was too late; milady had stabbed herself.

But the knife had very fortunately, we should say skilfully, come in contact with the steel busk, which, at that period, like a cuirass, defended women's bosoms; it had glided down it, tearing her dress, and had penetrated slantingly between the flesh and the ribs.

Milady's robe was none the less stained with blood in a second. Milady fell backward and seemed to have fainted.

Felton snatched away the knife.

"See, my lord," said he, in a deep, gloomy tone, "here is a woman who was under my guard, and who has killed herself!"

"Do not worry, Felton," said Lord Winter; "she is not dead; demons do not die so easily. Do not worry, but go wait for me in my chamber."

"But, my lord!—"

"Go, sir, I command you."

At this injunction from his superior Felton obeyed; but as he went out he put the knife into his bosom.

Lord Winter contented himself with calling the woman who waited on milady, and when she came he recommended the prisoner, who was still in a swoon, to her care, and left her alone with her.

But as the wound, after all, might be serious, he immediately sent off a man on horseback to fetch a doctor.

CHAPTER LVIII.

ESCAPE.

As Lord Winter had thought, milady's wound was not dangerous. So soon as she was left alone with the woman whom the baron had summoned, and who hastened to her, she opened her eyes.

It was necessary, however, to affect weakness and pain, but this was not a very difficult task for an actress like milady. Thus the poor woman was completely the prisoner's dupe, and, notwithstanding her entreaties, she persisted in watching all night.

But this woman's presence did not prevent milady from thinking.

There was no longer any doubt that Felton was convinced; Felton was hers. If an angel appeared to that young man to accuse milady, he would certainly, in the disposition of mind he was then in, regard him as a messenger from the demon.

Milady smiled at this thought, for Felton was henceforth her only hope — her only means of safety.

But Lord Winter might have suspected him! But Felton himself might now be watched!

Toward four o'clock in the morning the doctor came. Since milady had stabbed herself the wound had already closed. The doctor could, therefore, measure neither its direction nor depth. He only recognized by milady's pulse that her case was not serious.

In the morning milady, under the pretence of not having slept during the night and wanting rest, sent away the woman who attended her.

She had one hope — that Felton would appear at the breakfast hour; but Felton did not come.

Were her fears realized? Was Felton, suspected by the baron, about to fail her at the decisive moment? She had only one day left. Lord Winter had announced her embarkation for the 23d, and it was now the morning of the 22d.

Nevertheless she still waited patiently till the dinner hour.

Though she had eaten nothing in the morning, the dinner was brought in at its usual time. Milady then perceived with terror that the uniform of the soldiers who guarded her was changed.

Then she ventured to ask what had become of Felton.

She was told that he had left the castle an hour before, on horseback. She inquired whether the baron was still at the castle. The soldier replied that he was, and that he had given orders to be informed if the prisoner wished to speak to him.

Milady replied that she was too weak at present, and that her only desire was to be left alone.

The soldier went out, leaving the dinner served.

Felton was sent away; the marines were changed; Felton, then, was mistrusted!

This was the last blow to the prisoner.

Left alone, she got up. The bed in which she had remained for prudence, and in order that she might be believed to be seriously wounded, burnt her like a blazing fire. She cast a glance at the door. The baron had had a plank nailed over the grating. He feared, no doubt, that through this opening she might still, by some diabolical means, succeed in corrupting her guards.

Milady smiled for joy. She was free now to give way to her transports without being observed. She walked up and down her chamber with the fury of a crazy woman, or a tigress shut up in an iron cage. Assuredly if the knife had been left in her hands she would now have thought, not of killing herself, but of killing the baron.

At six o'clock Lord Winter came in. He was armed to the teeth. This man, in whom milady, till that time, had only seen a rather silly gentleman, had become an admirable jailer. He appeared to foresee everything, to divine everything, to anticipate everything.

A single look at milady informed him of all that was passing in her mind.

"Ay!" said he, "I see; but you will not kill me to-day either. You have no longer a weapon; and besides I am on my guard. You began to pervert my poor Felton. He was already yielding to your infernal influence. But I intend to save him. He will never see you again—all is over. Get your clothes together; to-morrow you will go. I had fixed the embarkation for the 24th. But I have reflected that the more promptly the affair takes place, the more certain it will be. To-morrow noon I shall have the order for your exile, signed—'Buckingham.' If you speak a single word to any one before you are on shipboard, my sergeant will blow your brains out. He has orders to do so. If, when on board, you speak a single word to any one before the captain permits you, the captain will have you thrown into the sea—that is

determined. *Au revoir*, then. That is all I had to say to you to-day. To-morrow I will see you again, to take my leave of you."

And at these words the baron went out. Milady had listened to all this tirade of threats with a smile of disdain on her lips, but with rage in her heart.

The supper was served. Milady felt that she needed all her strength. She did not know what might take place during this night, which was approaching portentously; for enormous clouds were rolling over the face of the sky, and distant lightning announced a storm.

The storm broke about ten o'clock; milady felt a consolation at seeing nature share the disorder of her heart; the thunder growled in the air like the anger in her thoughts. It seemed to her that the blast sweeping along dishevelled her brow, as it bowed the branches and bore away their leaves. She howled as the hurricane howled, and her voice was lost in the great voice of nature, which seemed also to groan with despair.

Suddenly she heard a tap at her window, and by the help of a flash of lightning she saw the face of a man appear behind the bars.

She ran to the window and opened it.

"Felton!" cried she; "I am saved!"

"Yes!" said Felton; "but be silent! be silent! I must have time to file through these bars. Only take care that they do not see me through the grating of the door."

"Oh! it is a proof that the Lord is on our side, Felton," replied milady; "the grating is closed with a board."

"That is well; God has made them mad!" said Felton.

"But what must I do?" asked milady.

"Nothing! nothing! only shut the window. Go to bed, or at least lie down with your clothes on. As soon as I have finished I will knock on the panes. But are you strong enough to follow me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Your wound?"

"Pains me, but will not prevent my walking."

"Be ready, then, at the first signal."

Milady shut the window, extinguished the lamp, and went, as Felton had desired her, to lie down on the bed. Amid the moaning of the storm she heard the grinding of the file on the bars, and by the light of every flash she saw Felton's shadow behind the panes.

She spent an hour scarcely breathing, panting, with a cold

sweat on her brow, and her heart oppressed by frightful agony at every movement she heard in the corridor.

There are hours that last a year.

At the end of an hour Felton tapped again.

Milady sprang out of bed and opened the window. Two bars removed made an opening large enough for a man to pass through.

"Are you ready?" asked Felton.

"Yes. Must I take anything with me?"

"Money, if you have any."

"Yes, fortunately they have left me all I had."

"So much the better, for I have expended all mine in hiring a vessel."

"Here!" said milady, placing a bag full of louis in Felton's hands. Felton took the bag and threw it to the foot of the wall.

"Now," said he, "will you come?"

"I am here."

Milady climbed on a chair, and leaned the upper part of her body through the window. She saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a rope ladder. For the first time a feeling of terror reminded her that she was a woman. The dark space frightened her.

"I expected this," said Felton.

"Oh! it's nothing! it's nothing!" said milady; "I will descend with my eyes shut."

"Have you confidence in me?" said Felton.

"Can you ask me such a question?"

"Put your two hands together. Cross them—that's right!"

Felton fastened her two wrists together with a handkerchief, and then tied a cord over the handkerchief.

"What are you doing?" asked milady in surprise.

"Put your arms round my neck, and fear nothing."

"But I shall make you lose your balance, and we shall both be dashed to pieces."

"Don't be afraid; I am a sailor."

Not a second was to be lost; milady put her arms round Felton's neck, and let herself slip out of the window.

Felton began to descend the ladder slowly, step by step. In spite of the weight of their bodies, the blast of the hurricane made them swing to and fro in the air.

All at once Felton stopped, anxious and alert, listening.

"What is it?" asked milady.

"Silence," said Felton, "I hear footsteps."

"We are discovered!"

There was a silence of several seconds.

"No," said Felton, "it is nothing."

"But what noise was that, then?"

"The patrol going their round."

"Where is their round?"

"Just under us."

"They will discover us!"

"No; unless it lightens they will not."

"But they will run against the ladder."

"Fortunately it is too short by six feet."

"Here they are! my God!"

"Silence!"

Both remained in suspense, motionless and breathless, within twenty feet of the ground, while the soldiers were passing beneath them, laughing and talking.

The patrol passed. The noise of their retreating footsteps and the murmur of their voices soon died away.

"Now," said Felton, "we are safe!"

Milady breathed a deep sigh and fainted.

Felton continued to descend. When he reached the bottom of the ladder, and found no more support for his feet, he clung to it with his hands. At length, coming to the last round, he hung by his hands and touched the ground. He stooped down, picked up the bag of money, and took it in his teeth.

Then he seized milady in his arms and set off briskly in the direction opposite to the one the patrol had taken. He soon left the beat, climbed across the rocks, and, when he reached the shore of the sea, whistled.

A similar signal replied to him, and five minutes after a boat appeared, rowed by four men.

The boat approached as near as it could to the shore, but there was not water deep enough for it to touch; and Felton walked into the sea up to his waist, being unwilling to trust his precious burden to any one.

Fortunately the storm was beginning to die away, but the sea was still rough. The little boat bounded over the waves like a nutshell.

"To the sloop," said Felton, "and give way lively."

The four men bent to their oars, but the sea was too high to let them get much hold of it.

At all events, they were leaving the castle behind them. That was the main thing. The night was extremely dark, it

was already almost impossible to make out the shore from the boat; it was therefore even more difficult to make out the boat from the shore.

A black speck was rocking on the sea. It was the sloop.

While the boat was advancing with all the speed its four oarsmen could give it, Felton untied the cord, and then the handkerchief that bound milady's hands together. Then when her hands were loosed, he took some sea-water and sprinkled it over her face.

Milady drew a deep breath and opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Saved," replied the young officer.

"Oh! saved! saved!" cried she. "Yes, there is the sky, here is the sea! The air I breathe is the air of liberty! Ah! thank you, Felton, thank you!"

The young man pressed her to his heart.

"But what is the matter with my hands?" asked milady: "it seems as if my wrists had been crushed in a vice?"

Milady held out her arms; her wrists were bruised.

"Alas!" said Felton, looking at her beautiful hands and gently shaking his head.

"Oh! it's nothing! it's nothing!" cried milady; "now I remember."

Milady looked searchingly around her.

"There it is," said Felton, touching the money bag with his foot.

They drew near to the sloop. A sailor on watch hailed the boat; the boat replied.

"What vessel is this?" asked milady.

"One I hired for you."

"Where is it going to carry me?"

"Wherever you please, after you have landed me at Portsmouth."

"What are you going to do at Portsmouth?" asked milady.

"Fulfil Lord Winter's orders," said Felton, with a gloomy smile.

"What orders?" insisted milady.

"Do you not understand?" asked Felton.

"No; explain yourself, I beg of you."

"As he mistrusted me he determined to guard you himself, and sent me in his place to get Buckingham to sign the order for your transportation.

"But if he mistrusted you, how could he confide such an order to you?"

"Could I be supposed to know what I was the bearer of?"

"True! And you are going to Portsmouth!"

"I have no time to lose. To-morrow is the 23d, and Buckingham sets sail to-morrow with his fleet."

"He sets sail to-morrow! Where for?"

"For Rochelle."

"He must not sail!" cried milady, forgetting her usual presence of mind.

"Do not worry!" replied Felton; "he will not sail."

Milady started with joy; she had just read to the depths of this young man's heart; Buckingham's death was written there at full length.

"Felton," cried she, "you are as great as Judas Macca-beus! If you die, I will die with you; that is all I can say to you."

"Silence!" cried Felton; "we are here."

In fact they were grazing the sloop.

Felton climbed up the ladder first, and gave milady his hand, while the sailors supported her, for the sea was still very turbulent.

An instant after they were on the deck.

"Captain," said Felton, "this is the lady of whom I spoke to you, and whom you must convey safe and sound to France."

"For a thousand pistoles," said the captain.

"I have paid you five hundred of them."

"That's correct," said the captain.

"And here are the other five hundred," replied milady, placing her hand upon the bag of gold.

"No," said the captain, "I stick to my bargain, and I agreed with this young man that the other five hundred shall not be due me till we arrive at Boulogne."

"And shall we arrive there?"

"Safe and sound," said the captain; "as true as my name's Jack Butler."

"Well," said milady, "if you keep your word, instead of five hundred I will give you a thousand pistoles."

"Hurrah for you, then, my pretty lady!" cried the captain; "and may God often send me such passengers as your ladyship."

"In the meanwhile," said Felton, "convey me to the little bay of — you know it was agreed you should put in there."

The captain replied by ordering the necessary manœuvres, and toward seven o'clock in the morning the little vessel was casting anchor in the designated bay.

During this passage Felton related everything to milady: how, instead of going to London, he had hired the little vessel; how he had returned; how he had scaled the wall by fastening cramps in the interstices of the stones as he ascended, to give him foothold; and how, when he had reached the bars, he fastened his ladder. Milady knew the rest.

Milady tried to encourage Felton in his project, but at the first words that issued from her mouth she plainly saw that the young fanatic stood more in need of being moderated than urged on.

It was agreed that milady should wait for Felton till ten o'clock. If he did not return by ten o'clock, she was to sail without him.

Then, in case he was free, he was to rejoin her in France, at the convent of the Carmelites, at Béthune.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT PORTSMOUTH, AUGUST 23, 1628.

FELTON took leave of milady as a brother about to go for a mere walk takes leave of his sister — by kissing her hand.

His whole person appeared in its ordinary state of calmness, only an unusual fire beamed from his eyes, like the glow of a fever; his brow was even paler than usual, his teeth were set, and his speech had a short, dry accent, indicating that something dark was going on within him.

As long as he remained in the boat which conveyed him to land, he kept his face toward milady, who, standing on the deck, followed him with her eyes. Both felt sufficiently relieved from the fear of pursuit. No one ever came into milady's apartment before nine o'clock, and it would require three hours to go from the castle to London.

Felton leaped ashore, climbed the little ascent leading to the top of the beach, saluted milady a last time, and took his course toward the city.

At the end of a hundred paces, as the ground kept sloping down, he could, on turning round, only see the mast of the sloop.

He immediately ran in the direction of Portsmouth, which he saw about half a mile before him, standing out in the haze of the morning, with its towers and houses.

Beyond Portsmouth the sea was covered with vessels, the

masts of which, like a forest of poplars stripped by the winter, were swaying with each breath of the wind.

Felton, in his swift walk, reviewed all the accusations, true or false, with which two years of mature meditations and long residence among the Puritans had armed him against the favorite of James I. and Charles I.

When he compared this minister's public crimes, startling crimes, European crimes, if we may say so, with the private and unknown crimes with which milady had charged him, Felton found that the more culpable of the two men who composed Buckingham's character was the one whose life the public did not know. This was because his love, so strange, so new, and so ardent, made him view Lady Winter's intamous and imaginary accusations, as through a magnifying glass we see frightful monsters which are in reality only atoms imperceptibly small compared to ants.

The swiftness of his walk heated his blood still more. The idea that he was leaving behind him, exposed to a frightful vengeance, the woman whom he loved, or rather adored as a saint, the emotion he had experienced, his present fatigue, all together exalted his mind above human feeling.

He entered Portsmouth about eight o'clock in the morning. The whole population was on foot. Drums were beating in the streets and in the port. The troops about to be embarked were marching toward the sea.

Felton arrived at the palace of the Admiralty, covered with dust and streaming with perspiration. His face, usually so pale, was purple with heat and passion. The sentinel was about to keep him away, but Felton called to the officer of the post, and drawing from his pocket the letter of which he was the bearer, —

“A pressing message from Lord Winter,” said he.

At the name of Lord Winter, who was known to be one of his Grace's most intimate friends, the officer of the post gave orders to pass Felton, who, indeed, wore a naval officer's uniform.

Felton darted into the palace.

At the moment he entered the vestibule, another man was entering likewise, covered with dust and out of breath, leaving at the gate a post-horse, which, as soon as he had alighted from it, sank down exhausted.

Felton and he addressed Patrick, the duke's confidential valet, at the same moment. Felton named Lord Winter. The stranger would give no name, and asserted that he could

make himself known to the duke alone. Each insisted on being admitted before the other.

Patrick, who knew Lord Winter had official dealings and friendly relations with the duke, gave the preference to the one who came in his name. The other was forced to wait, and it was easy to see how he cursed the delay.

The valet led Felton through a large hall, in which were waiting the deputies from Rochelle, headed by the Prince de Soubise, and introduced him into a closet, where Buckingham, just out of the bath, was finishing his toilet, on which, as usual, he was bestowing extraordinary attention.

"Lieutenant Felton, from Lord Winter," said Patrick.

"From Lord Winter!" repeated Buckingham; "let him come in."

Felton entered. Buckingham was in the act of throwing on a couch a rich dressing-gown worked with gold, to put on a blue velvet doublet embroidered with pearls.

"Why did not the baron come himself?" demanded Buckingham; "I expected him this morning."

"He desired me to tell your Grace," replied Felton, "that he very much regretted not having that honor, but that he was prevented by the guard he is obliged to keep at the castle."

"Yes, yes," said Buckingham; "I know he has a prisoner."

"I wish to speak to your Grace of that prisoner," replied Felton.

"Well, then, speak!"

"What I have to say of her can only be heard by yourself, my lord!"

"Leave us, Patrick," said Buckingham, "but remain within sound of the bell. I will call you presently."

Patrick went out.

"We are alone, sir," said Buckingham; "speak!"

"My lord," said Felton, "the Baron Winter wrote to you the other day to request you to sign an order of embarkation relative to a young woman named Charlotte Backson."

"Yes, sir, and I answered him that if he would bring or send me the order I would sign it."

"Here it is, my lord."

"Give it to me," said the duke.

And, taking it from Felton, he cast a rapid glance over the paper. Then, perceiving that it was the one that had been mentioned to him, he laid it on the table, took a pen, and prepared to sign it.

"Pardon, my lord," said Felton, stopping the duke; "but does your Grace know that Charlotte Backson is not this young woman's real name?"

"Yes, sir, I know it," replied the duke, dipping the pen into the ink.

"Then your Grace knows her real name?" asked Felton, in a sharp tone.

"I know it."

And the duke put the pen to the paper. Felton grew pale.

"And knowing her real name, my lord," replied Felton, "will you sign it all the same?"

"I certainly will," said Buckingham, "and sooner twice than once."

"I cannot believe," continued Felton, in a voice that became sharper and harsher, "that your Grace knows that this concerns Lady Winter."

"I know it perfectly well, though I am astonished that you know it."

"And will your Grace sign that order without remorse?"

Buckingham looked at the young man haughtily.

"Indeed, sir, do you know you are asking me strange questions, and that I am very silly to reply to them?"

"Reply to them, my lord," said Felton; "the circumstances are more serious than perhaps you imagine."

Buckingham reflected that the young man, coming from Lord Winter, very likely spoke in his name, and softened his manner a little.

"Without remorse," said he; "and the baron knows as well as myself that Lady Winter is a very guilty woman, and it is almost equivalent to pardoning her to reduce her punishment to transportation."

The duke put his pen to the paper.

"You will not sign that order, my lord!" said Felton, taking a step toward the duke.

"Not sign this order?" said Buckingham; "and why not?"

"Because you will look into your own heart, and you will do justice to Lady Winter."

"I should do justice to Lady Winter by sending her to Tyburn," said Buckingham; "Lady Winter is an infamous woman."

"My lord, Lady Winter is an angel; you know that she is, and I demand her liberty of you."

"Come, come!" exclaimed Buckingham; "are you mad, to speak to me in this manner?"

"My lord, excuse me! I speak as I can; I am restraining myself. But, my lord, think of what you are on the point of doing and beware lest you go too far!"

"What do you say? God pardon me!" cried Buckingham; "I think he threatens me!"

"No, my lord, I still pray, and I say to you: one drop of water suffices to make the full vase overflow, one slight fault may draw down punishment on the life spared in spite of so many crimes."

"Mr. Felton," said Buckingham, "you will please to withdraw, and place yourself under arrest immediately."

"You shall hear me to the end, my lord. You seduced this young girl, you outraged, defiled her! Repair your crimes toward her, let her go free, and I will not require anything else from you."

"You will not require!" said Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment, and dwelling upon each syllable of the four words which he had just pronounced.

"My lord," continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke, "my lord, beware! All England is weary of your iniquities. My lord, you have abused the royal power, which you have almost usurped. My lord, you are held in horror by God and men. God will punish you hereafter, but I will punish you here!"

"Ah! this is too much!" cried Buckingham, taking a step toward the door.

Felton barred his passage.

"I ask it humbly of you, my lord," said he; "sign the order for Lady Winter's liberation. Reflect — she is a woman you have dishonored."

"Withdraw, sir," said Buckingham, "or I will call my attendant and have you placed in irons."

"You shall not call," said Felton, throwing himself between the duke and the bell standing on a silver-mounted stand; "beware, my lord; you are in God's hands!"

"In the devil's hands, you mean!" cried Buckingham, raising his voice so as to attract the notice of his people without absolutely calling.

"Sign, my lord, sign Lady Winter's liberation," said Felton, holding a paper to the duke.

"What, by force! You are joking! Hello! Patrick!"

"Sign, my lord!"

"Never."

"Never?"

"Help!" cried the duke, and at the same time sprang toward his sword.

But Felton gave him no time to draw it. He held the knife, with which milady had stabbed herself, open in his bosom. With one bound he was on the duke.

At that moment Patrick entered the room, crying:

"A letter from France, my lord."

"From France!" cried Buckingham, forgetting everything on thinking from whom that letter came.

Felton took advantage of this moment, and plunged the knife into his side up to the handle.

"Ah! traitor!" cried Buckingham, "thou hast killed me!"

"Murder!" screamed Patrick.

Felton cast his eyes round for means of escape, and seeing the door free he rushed into the next chamber, in which, as we said, the deputies from Rochelle were waiting, crossed it as quickly as possible, and sprang toward the staircase. But on the first step he met Lord Winter, who, seeing him pale, wild, livid, and stained with blood, both on his hands and face, seized him by the throat, crying:

"I knew it! I guessed it! A minute too late! Oh, unfortunate, unfortunate that I am!"

Felton made no resistance. Lord Winter placed him in the hands of the guards, who led him, until they should receive fresh orders, to a little terrace looking out over the sea, and rushed into Buckingham's room.

At the cry uttered by the duke and Patrick's scream, the man whom Felton had met in the ante-chamber darted into the closet.

He found the duke lying on a sofa, with his hand pressed convulsively over the wound.

"La Porte," said the duke in a faint voice, "La Porte, do you come from her?"

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Anne of Austria's faithful cloak-bearer, "but too late, perhaps."

"Silence, La Porte; you may be overheard; Patrick, let no one enter. Oh! I shall not know what she says to me! My God! I am dying!"

And the duke fainted.

In the meanwhile Lord Winter, the deputies, the leaders of the expedition, the officers of Buckingham's household, had all made their way into the chamber. Cries of despair resounded on all sides. The news which filled the palace with tears and groans soon became known, and spread throughout the city.

The report of a cannon announced that something new and unexpected had taken place.

Lord Winter was tearing his hair.

"Too late by a minute!" cried he, "too late by a minute! Oh! my God! my God! what a misfortune!"

In fact, he had been informed at seven o'clock in the morning that a rope ladder was swaying from one of the castle windows. He had hastened to milady's chamber, found it empty, the window open and the bars filed, had remembered the verbal caution D'Artagnan had transmitted to him by his messenger, had trembled for the duke, and running to the stable, without taking time to have a horse saddled, had jumped upon the first he came to, had galloped off at full speed, had alighted in the court-yard, had ascended the stairs precipitately, and on the top step, as we have said, had met Felton.

The duke, however, was not dead. He recovered a little, opened his eyes, and hope revived in all hearts.

"Gentlemen," said he, "leave me alone with Patrick and La Porte. Ah! is that you, De Winter! You sent me a strange madman this morning. See what a condition he brought me to!"

"Oh, my lord!" cried the baron, "I shall never console myself for it."

"And you would be quite wrong, my dear De Winter," said Buckingham, holding out his hand to him; "I do not know the man who deserves being regretted during the whole of another man's life; but leave us, I pray you."

The baron went out sobbing.

Only the wounded duke, La Porte, and Patrick remained in the closet. A surgeon had been sent for, but none could be found.

"You will live, my lord, you will live!" repeated Anne of Austria's faithful servant, on his knees before the duke's sofa.

"What did she write me?" said Buckingham feebly, streaming with blood and suppressing his frightful agony to speak of her he loved; "what did she write me? Read me her letter."

"Oh! my lord!" said La Porte.

"Obey, La Porte; do you not see I have no time to lose?"

La Porte broke the seal and placed the paper before the duke's eyes; but Buckingham tried in vain to make out the writing.

"Read it!" said he, "read it! I cannot see — read, then! for soon, perhaps, I shall not hear, and I shall die without knowing what she has written me."

La Porte made no further objection, and read:

"MILORD: By what I have suffered by you and for you since I have known you, I conjure you, if you have any care for my repose, to interrupt those great armaments which you are preparing against France, to put an end to a war the ostensible cause of which is publicly said to be religion, and the hidden and real cause of which is privately whispered to be your love for me. This war may bring not only great catastrophes on England and France, but misfortunes on you, milord, for which I should never console myself.

"Be careful of your life, which is threatened, and which will be dear to me from the moment I am not obliged to see an enemy in you.

"Your affectionate

"ANNE."

Buckingham collected all his remaining strength to listen to the reading of the letter. Then, when it was ended, as if he had met with a bitter disappointment in it, —

"Have you nothing else to say to me verbally, La Porte?" asked he.

"Yes, monseigneur! The queen charged me to bid you be on your guard, for she has been informed that your assassination would be attempted."

"And is that all? is that all?" replied Buckingham impatiently.

"She likewise charged me to tell you that she still loved you."

"Ah," said Buckingham, "God be praised! My death, then, will not be to her as the death of a stranger."

La Porte burst into tears.

"Patrick," said the duke, "bring me the casket in which the diamond studs were kept."

Patrick brought the object desired, which La Porte recognized as having belonged to the queen.

"Now the white satin sachet on which her monogram is embroidered in pearls."

Patrick again obeyed.

"Here, La Porte," said Buckingham, "these are the only remembrances I ever received from her, this silver casket and

these two letters. You will restore them to her Majesty; and as a last memorial" — (he looked round for some valuable object) — "you will add to them —"

He still looked; but his eyes, darkened by death, saw only the knife which had fallen from Felton's hand, still steaming with the red blood spread over its blade.

"And you will add to them this knife," said the duke, pressing the hand of La Porte.

He had just strength enough to place the sachet at the bottom of the silver casket, and to let the knife fall into it, making a sign to La Porte that he was no longer able to speak. Then, in a last convulsion, which he had no longer the power to resist, he slipped from the sofa to the floor.

Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham tried to smile a last time, but death checked his wish, which remained graven on his brow like a last kiss of love.

At this moment the duke's surgeon arrived, quite terrified. He was already on board the admiral's ship, where they had been obliged to go for him.

He approached the duke, took his hand, held it for an instant in his own, and letting it fall, —

"All is useless," said he; "he is dead."

"Dead! dead!" cried Patrick.

At this cry all the crowd came again into the apartment, and everywhere nothing but consternation and tumult prevailed.

As soon as Lord Winter saw Buckingham was dead he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers were still guarding on the terrace of the palace.

"Miserable wretch!" said he to the young man, who since Buckingham's death had regained the coolness and self-possession which was never again to abandon him; "miserable wretch! what hast thou done?"

"I have avenged myself!" said he.

"Avenged yourself!" said the baron; "rather say that you have served as an instrument for that cursed woman. But I swear to you that this crime shall be her last."

"I don't know what you mean," replied Felton quietly; "and I am ignorant of whom you are speaking, my lord. I killed the Duke of Buckingham because he twice refused your request to have me appointed captain. I punished him for his injustice, that is all."

De Winter, stupefied, looked on while the soldiers bound Felton, and did not know what to think of such insensibility.

One thing alone, however, cast a shade over Felton's pallid brow. At every noise he heard, the simple Puritan fancied he recognized milady's step and voice coming to throw herself into his arms, to accuse herself and meet death with him.

Suddenly he started — his eyes became fixed upon a point of the sea which the terrace where he was overlooked. With a sailor's eagle eye, he had recognized there, where another would have seen only a gull hovering over the waves, the sail of the sloop, sailing toward the coast of France.

He grew deadly pale, placed his hand on his breaking heart, and perceived how he had been betrayed.

"One last favor, my lord!" said he to the baron.

"What is that?" replied his lordship.

"What time is it?"

The baron drew out his watch.

"It wants ten minutes to nine," said he.

Milady had hastened her departure by an hour and a half; as soon as she heard the cannon announcing the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed.

The vessel was sailing away under a blue sky at a great distance from the coast.

"God has so willed it!" said he, with a fanatic's resignation, but without, however, being able to take his eyes from that ship, on board of which he doubtless fancied he could distinguish the white phantom of her to whom his life was to be sacrificed.

Lord Winter followed his look, observed his suffering, and guessed all.

"Be punished *alone*, in the first place, miserable man!" said Lord Winter to Felton, who allowed himself to be dragged away with his eyes turned toward the sea; "but I swear to you, by the memory of my brother whom I loved so much, that your accomplice is not saved."

Felton hung down his head without pronouncing a syllable.

Lord Winter descended the stairs rapidly, and went to the port.

CHAPTER LX.

IN FRANCE.

THE first fear of the king of England, Charles I., on learning of the duke's death, was that such terrible news might discourage the Rochellais; he tried, says Richelieu in his memoirs, to conceal it from them as long as possible, closing all the ports of his kingdom, and carefully keeping watch that no vessel should go out until the army which Buckingham was getting together had set sail, taking upon himself, in default of Buckingham, to superintend its departure.

He carried the strictness of this order so far as to detain in England the ambassadors of Denmark, who had taken leave, and the ordinary ambassador of Holland, who was to take back to the port of Flushing the Indian merchantmen which Charles I. had caused to be restored to the United Provinces.

But as it did not occur to him to give this order till five hours after the event, that is to say, till two o'clock in the afternoon, two vessels had already left the port; one bearing, as we know, milady, who, already anticipating the event, was further confirmed in that belief by seeing the black flag flying at the mast-head of the admiral's ship.

As to the second vessel, we will relate hereafter whom it carried and how it set sail.

During all this time, nothing new happened in the camp at Rochelle. Only the king, who was much bored as usual, but perhaps a little more so in the camp than elsewhere, resolved to go incognito and spend the festival of Saint Louis at Saint-Germain's, and asked the cardinal to order him an escort of twenty musketeers only. The cardinal, who was sometimes affected by the king's unrest, granted this leave of absence with great pleasure to his royal lieutenant, who promised to return about the 15th of September.

M. de Tréville, on being informed by his Eminence, packed his portmanteau, and as, without knowing the cause, he knew the great desire and even imperative need that his friends had of returning to Paris, he fixed on them, of course, to form part of the escort.

The four young men heard the news a quarter of an hour after M. de Tréville, for they were the first to whom he communicated it. Then D'Artagnan appreciated the favor the cardinal had conferred on him by transferring him at last to

the musketeers, for had it not been for that circumstance, he would have been forced to remain in the camp, while his companions left it.

His impatience to return toward Paris, of course, had for its cause the danger which Madame Bonacieux would run of meeting at the convent of Béthune with milady, her mortal enemy. Aramis, therefore, as we have said, had written immediately to Marie Michon, the seamstress at Tours, who had such fine acquaintances, to obtain from the queen permission for Madame Bonacieux to leave the convent, and to retire either into Lorraine or Belgium. They had not long to wait for an answer; and eight or ten days later, Aramis received the following letter:

“MY DEAR COUSIN: Here is my sister’s permission to withdraw our little servant from the convent of Béthune, the air of which you think does not agree with her. My sister sends you her permission with great pleasure, for she is very fond of the little girl, to whom she intends to be more serviceable hereafter.

“I salute you,

“MARIE MICHON.”

In this letter was enclosed an order conceived in these terms:

“The superior of the convent of Béthune will place in the hands of the person who shall present this note to her, the novice who entered the convent on my recommendation and under my patronage.

“At the Louvre, August 10, 1628.

ANNE.”

It may be easily imagined how the relationship between Aramis and a seamstress who called the queen her sister amused the young men; but Aramis begged his friends not to revert to the subject again, declaring that if another single word were said to him about it, he would never again employ his cousin to interfere in such affairs.

There was no more talk, therefore, of Marie Michon among the four musketeers, who, besides, had what they wanted: that is to say, the order for withdrawing Madame Bonacieux from the convent of the Carmelites at Béthune. To be sure this order would not be of great use to them while they were in camp at Rochelle, that is to say, at the other end of France. So D’Artagnan was on the point of asking leave of absence of

M. de Tréville, at the same time candidly confiding to him the importance of his departure, when the news was transmitted to him, as well as to his three friends, that the king was about to set out for Paris with an escort of twenty musketeers, and that they formed part of the escort.

Their joy was great. They sent their lackeys on in advance with the baggage, and set out on the morning of the 16th.

The cardinal accompanied his Majesty from Surgères to Mauzé, and there the king and his minister took leave of each other with great demonstrations of friendship.

The king, however, who was after amusement, while travelling as fast as possible, — for he was anxious to be in Paris by the 23d, — stopped from time to time to fly the magpie, a pastime the taste for which had been formerly inspired in him by De Luynes, and for which he had always preserved a great liking. Sixteen of the twenty musketeers, when the thing happened, rejoiced greatly at this relaxation, but four cursed it heartily. D'Artagnan, in particular, had a perpetual buzzing in his ears, which Porthos explained in this way :

“A very great lady has told me that that means somebody is talking of you somewhere.”

At length the escort passed through Paris on the 23d, in the night. The king thanked M. de Tréville, and permitted him to give out furloughs of four days, on condition that not one of those so favored should appear in any public place, under penalty of the Bastille.

The first four furloughs granted, as may be imagined, were to our four friends. Moreover, Athos obtained of M. de Tréville six days instead of four, and got these six days lengthened by two nights more, for they set out on the 24th at five o'clock in the evening, and, as a further kindness, M. de Tréville post-dated the furlough to the morning of the 25th.

“Good Lord !” said D'Artagnan, who, as we know, never scrupled at anything ; “it seems to me we are making a great trouble for a very simple thing. In two days, by using up two or three horses (which I care little about, as I have money), I am at Béthune, I present my letter from the queen to the superior, and I bring back the dear treasure I go to seek, not into Lorraine, not into Belgium, but to Paris, where she will be much better concealed, particularly while the cardinal is at Rochelle. Then once back from the campaign, half by the protection of her cousin, half as a favor for what we have personally done for her, we shall obtain from

the queen what we desire. Stay here, then, and do not exhaust yourselves with useless fatigue. Myself and Planchet are all that such a simple expedition requires."

To this Athos replied calmly :

"We, also, have money left; for I have not yet drunk up all my share of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not entirely eaten theirs. So we will use up four horses as well as one. But consider, D'Artagnan," added he, in a tone so solemn that it made the young man shudder, "consider that Béthune is a city where the cardinal agreed to meet a woman, who, wherever she goes, brings misery with her. If you had only to deal with four men, D'Artagnan, I would let you go alone. You have to do with that woman — all four of us will go, and I hope to God that, with our four lackeys, there may be enough of us."

"You terrify me, Athos!" cried D'Artagnan; "but what do you fear?"

"Everything!" replied Athos.

D'Artagnan studied his companions' faces, which, like Athos's, wore an expression of deep anxiety, and they continued their route as fast as their horses could carry them, but without adding another word.

On the evening of the 25th, as they were entering Arras, and as D'Artagnan was dismounting at the tavern of the Golden Harrow to drink a glass of wine, a horseman came out of the post-yard, where he had just had a relay, starting off at a gallop, with a fresh horse, on the road to Paris. At the moment he was passing through the gateway into the street, the wind blew open the cloak in which he was wrapped, though it was August, and lifted his hat, which the traveller seized with his hand just as it left his head, and pulled it down quickly over his eyes.

D'Artagnan, who had his eyes fixed on this man, became very pale, and let his glass fall.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Planchet. "Oh, come, gentlemen, gentlemen! My master is ill!"

The three friends hastened to D'Artagnan, but, instead of finding him ill, met him running for his horse. They stopped him at the door.

"Now, where the devil are you going in this way?" cried Athos.

"It is he!" cried D'Artagnan, pale with passion, and with the sweat on his brow; "it is he! Let me overtake him!"

"He—who?" asked Athos.

"He — my man!"

"What man?"

"That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always seen when threatened by some misfortune, he who accompanied the horrible woman when I met her for the first time, he whom I was seeking when I offended our friend Athos, he whom I saw on the very morning of the day Madame Bonacieux was carried off! I just saw him! It is he! I recognized him when his cloak blew open!"

"The devil!" said Athos musingly.

"To horse, gentlemen! to horse! Let us pursue him. We shall overtake him!"

"My dear friend," said Aramis, "remember that he's gone in an opposite direction to that in which we are going, that he has a fresh horse and ours are fatigued, that consequently we shall disable our own horses without even the chance of overtaking him. Let the man go, D'Artagnan; let us save the woman."

"Hello, sir!" cried a hostler, running out and looking after the unknown; "hello, sir, here is a paper which dropped out of your hat! Hello, sir! Hello!"

"Friend," said D'Artagnan, "a half-pistole for that paper!"

"Faith, sir, with great pleasure! Here it is!"

The hostler, delighted with the good day's work he had done, went into the yard again; D'Artagnan unfolded the paper.

"Well?" eagerly demanded all his three friends, surrounding him.

"Only one word!" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Aramis, "but that one word is the name of some town or village."

"*Armentières!*" read Porthos; "*Armentières* — I don't know it."

"And that name of a town or village is written in her hand!" cried Athos.

"Come on! come on!" said D'Artagnan; "let us keep that paper carefully — perhaps I have not lost my last pistole. To horse, my friends, to horse!"

And the four friends galloped off on the road to Béthune.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CARMELITE CONVENT AT BÉTHUNE.

GREAT criminals carry with them a kind of predestination causing them to surmount all obstacles, causing them to escape all dangers up to the moment which Providence, exhausted, has designated as the reef of their impious fortunes.

Thus it was with milady. She passed through the cruisers of both nations, and reached Boulogne without accident.

On landing at Portsmouth milady was an Englishwoman, driven from Rochelle by the persecutions of the French. On landing at Boulogne, after a two days' passage, she claimed to be a Frenchwoman, whom the English persecuted at Portsmouth, out of their hatred for France.

Milady had, likewise, the most efficacious of passports — her beauty, her noble appearance, and the generosity with which she scattered pistoles. Freed from the usual formalities by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hand, she only stayed long enough at Boulogne to post a letter, conceived in the following terms:

“To his Eminence Monseigneur Cardinal Richelieu, in his camp before Rochelle:

“Monseigneur, let your Eminence be reassured: his Grace the Duke of Buckingham *will not set out* for France.

“Boulogne, evening of the 25th.

“LADY DE ———.”

“P.S. — According to your Eminence's desire, I am going to the convent of the Carmelites at Béthune, where I will await your orders.”

In fact, that same evening milady began her journey. Night overtook her. She stopped and slept at an inn. At five o'clock the next morning she was on her way again, and three hours later entered Béthune.

She inquired for the Carmelite convent, and went to it immediately.

The superior came to meet her. Milady showed her the cardinal's order. The abbess assigned her a chamber and had breakfast served.

All the past was already effaced from this woman's eyes,

and her looks, fixed on the future, beheld only the high fortunes reserved for her by the cardinal, whom she had so successfully served without his name being in any way mixed up with the sanguinary affair. The ever-new passions consuming her gave to her life the appearance of those clouds which float in the sky, reflecting sometimes its azure, sometimes the fire, sometimes the opaque blackness of the tempest, and which leave behind them no traces on the earth but devastation and death.

After breakfast the abbess came to pay her a visit. There are very few distractions in the cloister, and the good mother-superior was eager to make acquaintance with her new inmate.

Milady wished to please the abbess. Now this was an easy matter for a woman so really superior as she was. She tried to be agreeable. She was charming, and won the good nun by her varied conversation, and by the graces of her whole person.

The abbess, who was the daughter of a noble house, took particular delight in those stories of the court which so seldom travel to the extremities of the kingdom, and which, above all, have so much difficulty in penetrating the walls of convents, on whose thresholds the noise of the world dies away.

Milady, on the contrary, was quite conversant with all aristocratic intrigues, in the midst of which she had constantly lived for five or six years. So she made it her business to entertain the good abbess with the mundane practices of the court of France, mixed with the king's extravagant devotions. She related to her the entire budget of gossip and scandal concerning the lords and ladies of the court, whom the abbess knew perfectly by name; touched lightly on the amours of the queen and the Duke of Buckingham, talking a great deal to induce her auditor to talk a little.

But the abbess was content to listen and smile, without replying at all. Milady, however, saw that this style of conversation amused her very much, and continued. But now she let the conversation fall on the cardinal.

But here she was greatly embarrassed. She did not know whether the abbess was a royalist or a cardinalist; she therefore confined herself to a prudent middle course. But the abbess, on her part, maintained a still more prudent reserve, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head every time that the fair traveller pronounced his Eminence's name.

Milady began to think she should be very greatly bored in the convent; so she resolved to risk something, in order immediately to know how to act afterwards. Desirous of seeing how far the good abbess's discretion would go, she began to tell a scandal carefully veiled at first, but very circumstantial afterwards, about the cardinal, relating the minister's amours with Madame d'Aiguillon, Marion de Lorme, and several other women of easy virtue.

The abbess listened more attentively, grew animated by degrees, and smiled.

"Good!" thought milady; "she likes my conversation. If she is a cardinalist, she has no fanaticism, at least, in it."

She then went on to describe the persecutions wreaked by the cardinal on his enemies. The abbess only crossed herself without approving or disapproving. This confirmed milady in her opinion that the nun was rather a royalist than a cardinalist. Milady, therefore, continued coloring her narrations more and more.

"I am very ignorant about all these matters," said the abbess at length; "but though we are distant from the court and remote from the interests of the world, we have very sad examples of what you have related; and one of our inmates has suffered much from the cardinal's vengeance and persecution."

"One of your inmates!" said milady. "Oh, heavens! Poor woman, I pity her, then!"

"And you are right, for she is much to be pitied; imprisonment, threats, ill-treatment, she has suffered everything. But after all," resumed the abbess, "the cardinal has, perhaps, plausible motives for acting thus; and though she has the look of an angel, we must not always judge people by appearances."

"Good!" said milady to herself; "who knows! Perhaps I am about to discover something here. I am in luck!"

And she tried to give her countenance an appearance of perfect candor.

"Alas!" said milady, "I know it is so. It is said that we must not believe in faces. But in what, then, shall we place confidence, if not in the most beautiful work of the Lord? I shall be deceived all my life, perhaps, but I shall always have faith in a person whose face inspires me with sympathy."

"You would, then, be tempted to believe," said the abbess, "that this young woman is innocent?"

"The cardinal does not only pursue crimes," said she; "there

are certain virtues which he pursues more severely than certain offences."

"Permit me, madame, to express my surprise," said the abbess.

"At what?" asked milady, naïvely.

"At the language you use."

"What do you find so astonishing in my language?" asked milady, smiling.

"You are the cardinal's friend, for he sends you here, and yet —"

"And yet I speak ill of him," replied milady, finishing the mother superior's thought.

"At least, you don't speak well of him."

"That is because I am not his friend," said she, sighing, "but his victim!"

"But yet the letter in which he recommends you to me?"

"Is an order for me to keep myself in a kind of prison from which he will release me through some of his satellites."

"But why did you not escape?"

"Where should I go? Do you believe there is a spot on earth which the cardinal cannot reach, if he takes the trouble to stretch forth his hand? If I were a man, that might really be possible; but what can a woman do? This young inmate of yours — has she tried to escape?"

"No, she has not; but she — that is another thing; I believe she is detained in France by some love affair."

"Then," said milady, with a sigh, "if she is in love, she is not altogether wretched."

"And so," said the abbess, looking at her with increasing interest, "I behold another poor persecuted woman?"

"Alas! yes," said milady.

The abbess looked at her for an instant anxiously, as if a fresh thought were rising in her mind.

"You are not an enemy of our holy faith?" said she hesitatingly.

"I?" cried milady; "I a Protestant! Oh, no! I call to witness the God who hears us that, on the contrary, I am a fervent Catholic!"

"Then, madame," said the abbess, smiling, "be reassured. The house in which you are will not be a very hard prison, and we will do all in our power to make you love your captivity. You will find here, moreover, that young woman who is persecuted, no doubt, in consequence of some court intrigue. She is amiable and courteous"

"What is her name?"

"She was sent to me by some one of very high rank, under the name of Kitty. I have made no effort to learn her other name."

"Kitty!" cried milady; "what! Are you sure?"

"That she is called so? Yes, madame. Do you know her?"

Milady smiled to herself at the idea which had occurred to her, that this might be her former waiting-maid. There was connected with the recollection of this girl a recollection of anger; and a desire of vengeance disordered milady's features, which, however, immediately recovered the calm and benevolent expression which this woman of a hundred faces had for a moment allowed them to lose.

"And when can I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?" asked milady.

"Why, this evening," said the abbess; "even during the day. But you told me you had been travelling these four days. This morning you rose at five o'clock; you must need rest. Go to bed and sleep; at dinner-time we will wake you."

Though milady would very willingly have gone without sleep, sustained as she was by all the excitements that a fresh adventure was awakening in her heart, ever thirsting for intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the mother superior's advice. During the preceding twelve or fifteen days she had experienced so many different emotions that if her iron frame was still capable of supporting fatigue, her mind required repose.

She therefore took leave of the abbess and went to bed, gently rocked by the ideas of vengeance which the name of Kitty had naturally evoked. She remembered that almost unlimited promise which the cardinal had given her if she succeeded in her enterprise. She had succeeded. D'Artagnan was therefore in her power!

One thing alone frightened her: that was the remembrance of her husband, the Comte de La Fère, whom she had thought dead, or at least expatriated, and whom she found again in Athos, D'Artagnan's best friend.

But, also, if he was D'Artagnan's friend he must have lent him his assistance in all the measures by which the queen had defeated his Eminence's projects. If he was D'Artagnan's friend he was the cardinal's enemy; and she, doubtless, would succeed in enveloping him in that vengeance by the coils of which she hoped to suffocate the young musketeer.

All these hopes were sweet thoughts to milady ; so, rocked by them, she soon fell asleep.

She was awakened by a gentle voice sounding at the foot of her bed. She opened her eyes, and saw the abbess, accompanied by a young woman with light hair and a delicate complexion, who was giving her a look full of benevolent curiosity.

The young woman's face was quite unknown to her ; each examined the other with great attention while exchanging the customary compliments. Both were very handsome, but of quite different styles of beauty. Milady, however, smiled on observing that she excelled the young woman by far in her noble air and aristocratic bearing. To be sure the novice's habit, which the young woman wore, was not very advantageous in sustaining a contest of this kind.

The abbess introduced them to each other. Then when this formality was accomplished, as her duties called her to the church, she left the two young women alone.

The novice, seeing milady remained in bed, was about to follow the mother superior, but milady stopped her.

"How, madame," said she ; "I have scarcely seen you, and you already wish to deprive me of your company, on which I had nevertheless counted a little, I must confess, for the time I have to pass here ?"

"No, madame," replied the novice, "only I thought I had chosen my time badly. You were asleep; you are fatigued."

"Well," said milady, "what can sleeping people wish for? A happy awakening! This awakening you have given me. So let me enjoy it at my ease," and, taking her hand, she drew her to an arm-chair which was near her bed.

The novice sat down.

"Heavens! how unfortunate I am!" said she ; "I have been here six months without the shadow of an amusement. You arrive and your presence was likely to afford me delightful company, and now here I am, according to all probability, likely to leave the convent at any moment!"

"What, are you going soon?" asked milady.

"At least I hope so," said the novice, with an expression of joy which she made no effort to disguise.

"I think I heard you had suffered through the cardinal," continued milady. "That would have been another motive for sympathy between us."

"So what I have heard from our good mother is true! You have likewise been a victim of that wicked priest?"

"Hush," said milady; "let us not, even here, speak thus of him: all my misfortunes arise from my having said almost the same as you have just said, before a woman who I thought was my friend, and who betrayed me. And are you also the victim of treachery?"

"No," said the novice, "but of my devotion; of a devotion to a woman I loved, for whom I would have laid down my life, for whom I would still do so."

"And who has abandoned you, is that it?"

"I have been unjust enough to believe so. But during the last two or three days I have had proof to the contrary, and I thank God for it! I should have been sorry to think she had forgotten me. But you, madame," continued the novice, "you appear to be free; and if you were inclined to escape, it would only rest with yourself to do so."

"Where would you have me go, without friends, without money, in a part of France with which I am unacquainted, and where I have never been before."

"Oh!" cried the novice, "as to friends, you would have them wherever you went, you appear so good and are so beautiful!"

"That does not prevent," replied milady, softening her smile so as to give it an angelic expression, "my being alone or being persecuted."

"Hear me," said the novice; "we must trust in heaven. There always comes a moment when the good you have done pleads your cause before God. And see! Perhaps it is your good fortune that you have met with me, humble and powerless as I am; for if I leave this place — well, I shall have powerful friends, who, after exerting themselves on my account, may also exert themselves for you."

"Oh! when I said I was alone," said milady, hoping to make the novice speak by speaking of herself, "it is not for want of some friends high in station. But these friends themselves tremble before the cardinal. The queen herself does not dare to oppose the terrible minister. I have proof that her Majesty, notwithstanding her excellent heart, has more than once been obliged to abandon persons who had served her, to the anger of his Eminence."

"Trust me, madame, the queen may seem to have abandoned those persons; but we must not put faith in appearances. The more they are persecuted the more she thinks of them, and often when they the least expect it, they receive proofs of kind remembrance."

"Alas!" said milady, "I believe so. The queen is so good!"

"Oh! you know her, then, that lovely and noble queen, by your speaking of her in this way!" cried the novice enthusiastically.

"That is to say," replied milady, driven into her intrenchments, "I have not the honor of knowing her personally. But I know a great number of her most intimate friends. I am acquainted with M. de Putange; I met M. Dujart in England; I know M. de Tréville."

"M. de Tréville!" exclaimed the novice; "do you know M. de Tréville?"

"Yes, perfectly well; intimately, even."

"What, the captain of the king's musketeers?"

"Yes, the captain of the king's musketeers."

"Oh! why, then, only see!" cried the novice; "we shall soon be well acquainted, almost friends. If you know M. de Tréville, you must have been at his house?"

"Often!" said milady, who having entered on this track, and perceiving that her falsehood was succeeding, was determined to carry it through.

"If you have visited him, you must have met some of his musketeers?"

"All those he is in the habit of receiving!" replied milady, for whom this conversation began to have a real interest.

"Name a few of those you know, and you will find they are my friends."

"Well," said milady, a little embarrassed, "I know M. de Souigny, M. de Courtivron, M. de Férusac."

The novice let her speak, but observing she stopped, —

"Don't you know," said she, "a gentleman named Athos?"

Milady became as pale as the sheets in which she was lying, and, mistress as she was of herself, could not help uttering a cry, seizing the novice's hand and devouring her with her looks.

"What is the matter? Oh, heavens!" asked the poor woman; "have I said anything that hurt your feelings?"

"No, no; but the name struck me, because I also used to know that gentleman, and it appeared strange to me to meet with a person who appears to know him well."

"Oh, yes, well! very well! Not only him, but also his friends Porthos and Aramis!"

"Indeed! I know them likewise! I know them," cried milady, who felt a chill penetrating to her heart.

"Well, if you know them, you know that they are good and

worthy gentlemen. Why do you not apply to them, if you need support?"

"That is to say," stammered milady, "I am not really very intimate with any of them. I know them from having heard one of their friends, Monsieur d'Artagnan, say a great deal about them."

"You know M. d'Artagnan!" cried the novice, in her turn seizing milady's hand and devouring her with her eyes.

Then, remarking the strange expression of milady's face, —

"Pardon me, madame," said she, "you know him — how?"

"Why," replied milady, considerably embarrassed, "why, as a friend."

"You are deceiving me, madame," said the novice. "You have been his mistress!"

"It is you who have been his mistress, madame," cried milady, in her turn.

"I!" exclaimed the novice.

"Yes, you. I know you now. You are Madame Bonacieux."

The young woman drew back in surprise and terror.

"Oh, do not deny it! Answer!" continued milady.

"Well! yes, madame!" said the novice; "are we rivals?"

Milady's face was illumined by such a savage joy that, in any other circumstances, Madame Bonacieux would have fled in terror. But she was absorbed by her jealousy.

"Speak, madame!" resumed Madame Bonacieux, with an energy of which one would not have thought her capable. "Have you been, or are you, his mistress?"

"Oh, no!" cried milady, with a tone that admitted no doubt of her truth; "never! never!"

"I believe you," said Madame Bonacieux; "but why, then, did you cry out so?"

"Do you not understand?" said milady, who had already overcome her agitation and recovered all her presence of mind.

"How can I understand? I know nothing."

"Can you not understand that M. d'Artagnan, being my friend, might take me into his confidence?"

"Indeed!"

"Do you not perceive that I know all? Your being carried off from the little house at Saint Germain, his despair, that of his friends, and their useless inquiries from that moment! How could I help being astonished when, without having the least expectation of such a thing, I meet you face to face; you,

of whom we have so often spoken together; you, whom he loves with all his soul; you, whom he had taught me to love before I had seen you! Ah! dear Constance, I have found you then, I see you at last!"

And milady stretched out her arms to Madame Bonacieux, who, convinced by what she had just said, saw nothing in this woman, whom an instant before she had believed to be her rival, but a sincere and devoted friend.

"Oh! pardon me!" cried she, sinking upon milady's shoulders; "I love him so dearly!"

The two women held each other for an instant in a close embrace. Assuredly, if milady's strength had been equal to her hatred, Madame Bonacieux would never have escaped alive from that embrace.

But as she could not stifle her, she smiled on her.

"Oh! dear, pretty, good little creature!" said milady; "how delighted I am to see you! Let me look at you!" And, while saying these words, she absolutely devoured her with her eyes. "Oh! yes, it is you indeed! From what he has told me, I know you now. I recognize you perfectly."

The poor young woman could not possibly suspect the frightfully cruel thought behind the rampart of that pure brow, behind those brilliant eyes, in which she read nothing but interest and compassion.

"Then you know what I have suffered," said Madame Bonacieux, "since he has told you what he has suffered; but to suffer for him is happiness."

Milady replied mechanically, "Yes, that is happiness."

She was thinking of something else.

"And, then," continued Madame Bonacieux, "my punishment is drawing to a close. To-morrow, perhaps this evening, I shall see him again; and then the past will no longer exist."

"This evening?" asked milady, roused from her revery by these words; "what do you mean? Are you expecting some news from him?"

"I expect D'Artagnan himself."

"Himself! D'Artagnan here!"

"Yes, D'Artagnan himself!"

"But that's impossible! He is at the siege of Rochelle, with the cardinal. He will not return till after the taking of the city."

"Ah! you fancy so; but is there anything impossible for my D'Artagnan, the noble and loyal gentleman?"

"Oh, I cannot believe you!"

"Well, read, then!" said the unhappy young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, presenting a letter to milady.

"Humph! Madame de Chevreuse's writing!" said milady to herself. "Ah! I was very sure messages came from that quarter."

And she greedily read the following few lines:

"MY DEAR CHILD: Hold yourself in readiness. *Our friend* will see you soon, and he will see you only to release you from the imprisonment in which your safety required you should be concealed. Prepare, then, for your departure, and never despair of us.

"Our charming Gascon has just proved himself as brave and faithful as ever. Tell him that certain parties are grateful to him for the warning he has given."

"Yes, yes," said milady, "the letter is precise. Do you know what that warning was?"

"No, I only suspect he has warned the queen against some fresh machinations of the cardinal."

"Yes, that's it, no doubt!" said milady, returning the letter to Madame Bonacieux, and allowing her head to sink thoughtfully on her bosom.

At that moment the galloping of a horse was heard.

"Oh!" cried Madame Bonacieux, darting to the window; "can it be he already!"

Milady stayed in bed, petrified by surprise. So many unexpected things were happening to her all at once that for the first time she was at a loss.

"D'Artagnan!" murmured she; "can it be he?" And she remained in bed with her eyes staring.

"Alas! no," said Madame Bonacieux. "It is a man I don't know. And yet he seems to be coming here. Yes, he has reined in his horse — he stops at the gate — he rings."

Milady sprang out of bed.

"Are you very sure it is not he?" said she.

"Oh! yes — very sure!"

"Perhaps you did not see him plainly."

"Oh! if I were to see the plume of his hat, the end of his cloak, I should know him!"

Milady continued to dress herself.

"Never mind! The man is coming here, do you say?"

"Yes, he has come in."

"He must come either for you or for me."

"My God! how agitated you seem."

"Yes, I admit I am. I have not your confidence; I am in dread of the cardinal."

"Hush!" said Madame Bonacieux; "some one is coming."

In fact, the door opened and the mother superior entered.

"Did you come from Boulogne?" demanded she of milady.

"Yes, I did," replied she, trying to recover her self-possession. "Who wants me?"

"A man who will not tell his name, but who comes from the cardinal."

"And wishes to speak with me?" asked milady.

"He wishes to speak to a lady just come from Boulogne."

"Then let him come in, if you please."

"Oh! my God! my God!" cried Madame Bonacieux; "can it be any bad news?"

"I am afraid so."

"I will leave you with this stranger, but as soon as he is gone, if you will permit me, I will return."

"Certainly! I beg you will."

The mother superior and Madame Bonacieux retired.

Milady was left alone, with her eyes fixed on the door. An instant after the jingling of spurs was heard on the stairs, then steps approached, the door opened, and a man appeared.

Milady uttered a cry of joy. This man was the Comte de Rochefort, the cardinal's personal agent.

CHAPTER LXII.

TWO KINDS OF DEMONS.

"Ah!" cried milady and Rochefort together, "so it is you?"

"Yes, it is."

"And you come?" — asked milady.

"From Rochelle. And you?"

"From England."

"Buckingham?"

"Dead or desperately wounded, as I was leaving without having succeeded in obtaining anything from him. A fanatic assassinated him."

"Ah!" said Rochefort, with a smile, "this is a piece of good luck! — one that will delight his Eminence! Have you informed him of it?"

"I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?"

"His Eminence was uneasy, and sent me to inquire after you."

"I only arrived yesterday."

"And what have you been doing since yesterday?"

"I have not wasted my time."

"Oh! I have no fear of that."

"Do you know whom I have found here?"

"No."

"Guess."

"How can I?"

"That young woman whom the queen took out of prison."

"The mistress of that fellow D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, Madame Bonacieux, with whose hiding-place the cardinal was unacquainted."

"Upon my word!" said De Rochefort, "here is a chance that may be coupled with the other! Truly, the cardinal is a privileged man!"

"Can you imagine my astonishment," continued milady, "when I found myself face to face with this woman?"

"Does she know you?"

"No."

"Then she looks on you as a stranger?"

Milady smiled.

"I am her best friend."

"Upon my honor, only you, my dear countess, can perform such miracles!"

"And it is well I can, chevalier," said milady; "for do you know what is going on?"

"No."

"They are going to take her away to-morrow or the day after, on an order from the queen."

"Indeed! And who is going to do that?"

"D'Artagnan and his friends."

"They are certainly going to such lengths that we shall have to send them to the Bastille."

"Why has it not been done already?"

"Well, because the cardinal has a weakness for these men which I do not understand."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"Well, then, tell him this, Rochefort: Tell him that our conversation at the inn of the Red Dovecote was overheard

by these four men. Tell him that, after his departure, one of them came to me, and took from me, by violence, the safe-conduct which he had given me. Tell him they warned Lord Winter of my journey to England; that this time again they nearly made me fail in my mission, as they did in the affair of the studs. Tell him that, among these four men, two only are to be feared — D'Artagnan and Athos. Tell him that the third, Aramis, is Madame de Chevreuse's lover. He must be left alone; we know his secret, and he may be useful. As to the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a simpleton, a booby, not worth troubling himself about."

"But these four men must be now at the siege of Rochelle?"

"I thought so, too, but a letter which Madame Bonacieux has received from Madame la Connétable, and which she had the imprudence to show me, leads me to believe that these four men, on the contrary, are on the road here to take her away."

"The devil! What's to be done?"

"What did the cardinal say with respect to me?"

"I was to take your despatches, written or verbal, to return post-haste; and when he shall know what you have done, he will think of what you have to do."

"So I must remain here?"

"Here, or in the neighborhood."

"You cannot take me with you?"

"No; the order is imperative. Near the camp you might be recognized; and your presence, you must be aware, would compromise his Eminence."

"Then I must wait here or in this vicinity?"

"Only tell me, beforehand, where you will wait for commands from the cardinal. Let me know always where to find you."

"Listen: it is probable I may not be able to remain here."

"Why not?"

"You forget that my enemies may arrive at any minute."

"True; but, then, is this little woman to escape his Eminence?"

"Bah!" said milady, with a smile that only belonged to herself, "didn't I tell you I am her best friend?"

"Ah, true! I may then tell the cardinal, respecting this woman, —"

"That he need not be anxious."

"Is that all?"

‘He will know what that means.’

“He will guess, at least. Now, then, what had I better do?”

“Go back again directly. It seems to me the news you bear is worth the trouble of a little diligence.”

“My chaise broke down coming into Lilliers.”

“Capital!”

“Why capital?”

“Yes; I want your chaise.”

“And how shall I travel, then?”

“At a gallop.”

“That’s very easy for you to say; a hundred and eighty leagues?”

“What’s that?”

“Well, it shall be done; and then?”

“Then, why, as you pass through Lilliers you will send me your chaise, with an order to your servant to place himself at my disposal.”

“Well.”

“You have, no doubt, about you some order from the cardinal?”

“I have ‘*full powers*.’”

“Show it to the abbess, and tell her that some one will come and fetch me either to-day or to-morrow, and that I am to follow the person who presents himself in your name.”

“Very well.”

“Don’t forget to speak harshly of me when you talk of me to the abbess.”

“Why so?”

“I am one of the cardinal’s victims. I must inspire confidence in poor little Madame Bonacieux.”

“You are right. Now, will you make me a report of all that has happened?”

“Why, I have related the events to you; you have a good memory; repeat what I have told you—a paper may get lost.”

“You are right; only let me know where to find you, so that I may not lose my time in hunting for you about the neighborhood.”

“You are right; wait.”

“Do you want a map?”

“Oh! I know this country well.”

“You? When were you here before?”

“I was brought up here.”

"Indeed!"

"It is worth something, you see, to have been brought up somewhere."

"You will wait for me, then, at —"

"Let me reflect a moment; oh, yes, at Armentières."

"What is Armentières?"

"A little town upon the Lys. I shall only have to cross the river, and I shall be in a foreign country."

"Capital! But it is understood you will cross the river only in case of danger."

"Certainly."

"And in that case, how shall I know where you are?"

"You do not want your lackey?"

"No."

"Is he to be depended on?"

"Perfectly."

"Let me have him then; no one knows him; I will leave him at the place I quit, and he will bring you to me."

"And you say you will wait for me at Armentières?"

"At Armentières."

"Write that name on a piece of paper, lest I forget it; that is not compromising; a name of a town, is it?"

"Eh! who knows? No matter!" said milady, writing the name on a half sheet of paper; "I will run the risk."

"Good!" said Rochefort, taking the paper from milady, folding it, and placing it in the lining of his hat. "Besides, do not worry. I will do as children do, and in case I lose the paper I will repeat the name as I go along. Now, is that all?"

"I believe so."

"Let us see: Buckingham dead or grievously wounded; your conversation with the cardinal overheard by the four musketeers; Lord Winter warned of your arrival at Portsmouth; D'Artagnan and Athos to the Bastille; Aramis Madame de Chevreuse's lover; Porthos a fool; Madame Bonacieux found again; to send you the chaise as soon as possible; to place my lackey at your disposal; to make you out to be a victim of the cardinal, in order that the abbess may entertain no suspicion; Armentières, on the banks of the Lys. Is that all correct?"

"In good truth, my dear chevalier, you are a miracle of memory. By the way, one thing more —"

"What is that?"

"I saw some very pretty woods which must be next the

convent garden ; say that I am to be permitted to walk in those woods. Who knows ? Perhaps I may need to go out of a back door."

"You think of everything."

"And you forget one thing."

"What's that ?"

"To ask me whether I need money."

"True, how much do you want ?"

"All you have in gold."

"I have five hundred pistoles, or thereabouts."

"I have as much ; with a thousand pistoles one can face everything. Empty your pockets."

"Here it is."

"Good ! When do you start ?"

"In an hour — time to eat a morsel while I am sending for a post-horse."

"Capital ! Farewell, chevalier !"

"Farewell, countess !"

"Recommend me warmly to his Eminence !"

"Recommend me to Satan !"

Milady and Rochefort exchanged a smile and separated.

An hour afterwards Rochefort set out at his horse's best speed ; five hours after that he was passing through Arras.

Our readers already know how he was recognized by D'Artagnan, and how that fact, by suggesting fears to the four musketeers, gave fresh activity to their journey.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE DROP OF WATER.

ROCHEFORT had scarcely departed when Madame Bonacieux came back. She found milady with a smiling countenance.

"Well," said the young woman, "what you dreaded has happened : this evening or to-morrow the cardinal will send some one to take you away."

"Who told you that, my dear ?" asked milady.

"I heard it from the mouth of the messenger himself."

"Come and sit down close to me," said milady.

"Here I am."

"Wait till I am sure no one can hear us."

"Why all these precautions ?"

"You shall know."

Milady arose and went to the door, opened it, looked down the corridor, and then returned and seated herself near Madame Bonacieux.

"Then," said she, "he has well played his part."

"Who has?"

"He who just now presented himself to the abbess as the cardinal's messenger?"

"So he was playing a part?"

"Yes, my dear."

"That man, then, is not —"

"That man," said milady, lowering her voice, "is my brother!"

"Your brother!" cried Madame Bonacieux.

"Well, no one must know this secret, my dear, but yourself. If you reveal it to any one at all I shall be lost, and you also, perhaps."

"Oh! heavens!"

"Listen to me; this is what has happened: My brother, who was coming to my assistance, to take me away by force, if it were necessary, fell in with the cardinal's emissary coming in search of me. He followed him. Reaching a solitary and retired part of the road, he drew his sword and required the messenger to deliver up to him the papers of which he was the bearer. The messenger resisted; my brother killed him."

"Oh!" said Madame Bonacieux, with a shudder.

"Remember that was the only way. Then my brother determined to substitute cunning for force. He took the papers, and presented himself here as the cardinal's emissary, and in an hour or two a carriage will come to take me away by order of his Eminence."

"I understand; your brother sends the carriage."

"Exactly so; but that is not all. That letter you have received, and which you believe to be from Madame de Chevreuse —"

"Well?"

"It is a forgery."

"How can that be?"

"Yes, a forgery; it is a snare to prevent your making any resistance when the persons come to fetch you."

"But D'Artagnan is coming!"

"Do not be deceived. D'Artagnan and his friends are detained at the siege of Rochelle."

"How do you know that?"

"My brother met some of the cardinal's emissaries in the

uniform of musketeers— You would have been summoned to the gate, you would have thought you went to meet friends, you would have been carried off and taken back again to Paris.”

“Oh! my God! my senses fail me amid such a chaos of iniquities. I feel, if this continues,” said Madame Bonacieux, raising her hands to her forehead, “I shall go mad!”

“Stop—”

“What?”

“I hear a horse’s steps; it is my brother setting off again. I want to give him a last farewell. Come.”

Milady opened the window and beckoned to Madame Bonacieux to join her. The young woman complied.

Rochefort passed at a gallop.

“Farewell, brother!” cried milady.

The chevalier raised his head, saw the two young women, and without stopping waved his hand in a friendly way to milady.

“Dear, good George!” said she, closing the window with an expression of face full of affection and melancholy.

And she resumed her seat as if plunged in entirely personal reflections.

“Dear lady,” said Madame Bonacieux, “pardon me for interrupting you, but what do you advise me to do? Good heavens! You have more experience than I have. Speak! I will listen.”

“In the first place,” said milady, “it is possible that I may be mistaken, and D’Artagnan and his three friends may really come to your assistance.”

“Oh! that would be too beautiful!” cried Madame Bonacieux. “So much happiness is not destined for me!”

“Then, you perceive, it would be only a question of time, a kind of race, which should arrive first. If your friends are the speedier, you are saved; if the cardinal’s satellites are, you are lost!”

“Oh! yes, yes! lost beyond redemption! What am I to do then? What am I to do?”

“There would be a very simple way, very natural—”

“What? Say!”

“To wait, concealed in the neighborhood, until you satisfied yourself who the men were who came to ask for you.”

“But where can I wait?”

“Oh! there is no difficulty in that. I shall stop and conceal myself at a few leagues from here, till my brother can

rejoin me. Well, I will take you with me. We can conceal ourselves and wait together."

"But I shall not be allowed to go; I am almost a prisoner here."

"As I am supposed to go by an order from the cardinal, no one will believe you are anxious to follow me."

"Well?"

"Well, the carriage is at the door, you bid me farewell, you get on the step to embrace me a last time. My brother's servant, who comes to fetch me, is forewarned; he makes a sign to the postilion and we set off at a gallop."

"But D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan! if he should come!"

"Well, shall we not know it?"

"How?"

"Nothing more easy. We will send my brother's servant back to Béthune, and, as I told you we can trust him, he shall assume a disguise and place himself in front of the convent. If the cardinal's emissaries arrive, he will not stir; if M. D'Artagnan and his friends come, he will bring them to us."

"He knows them, then?"

"Certainly he does. Has he not seen M. d'Artagnan at my house?"

"Oh! yes, yes, you are right. In this way all will go well — all will be for the best; but do not go far from here."

"Seven or eight leagues at most. We will stay on the frontier, for instance; and at the first alarm we can leave France."

"And what shall we do meantime?"

"Wait."

"But if they come?"

"My brother's carriage will be here before them."

"Supposing I am at a distance from you when the carriage comes for you; at dinner or supper, for instance?"

"Do one thing."

"What?"

"Tell your good mother superior that, in order that we may be as much together as possible, you beg her to let you take your meals with me."

"Will she let me?"

"What harm is there in it?"

"Oh, very good! In this way we shall not be separated for an instant."

"Well, go down to her, then, and make your request. My head feels a little heavy. I will take a turn in the garden."

"Go; and where shall I find you?"

"Here, in an hour."

"Here, in an hour. Oh! how good you are! and I thank you!"

"How could I help being interested in you? If you were not so beautiful and so amiable, are you not the beloved of one of my best friends?"

"Dear D'Artagnan! Oh! how he will thank you!"

"I hope so. Now, then, all is agreed; let us go down."

"You are going into the garden?"

"Yes."

"Go along this corridor, and a little staircase will bring you to it."

"Excellent—thank you!"

And the two women parted, exchanging affectionate smiles.

Milady had told the truth—her head was heavy; for her ill-arranged plans clashed against one another like a chaos. She needed to be alone in order to collect her thoughts a little. She saw vaguely into the future; but she needed silence and quiet in order to give all her ideas, still in confusion, a distinct form and a regular plan.

The most pressing thing was, to get Madame Bonacieux away and convey her to a place of safety, and there, in case of necessity, use her as a hostage. Milady began to question the issue of this terrible duel, in which her enemies showed as much perseverance as she did animosity.

Besides, she felt as we feel when a storm is approaching, that this issue was near and could not fail to be terrible.

The principal thing for her then was, as we have said, to keep Madame Bonacieux in her power. Madame Bonacieux was D'Artagnan's very life—the life of the woman he loved was more than his life; in case of ill fortune, this was a way of negotiating and of certainly obtaining favorable conditions.

Now, this point was settled: Madame Bonacieux, without any suspicion, accompanied her. Once concealed with her at Armentières, it would be easy to make her believe that D'Artagnan had not come to Béthune. In a fortnight, at the most, Rochefort would be back again. During that fortnight, moreover, she would have time to think how she could best be revenged on the four friends. She entertained no fear of being bored, thank God! for she should enjoy the sweetest pastime events could offer to a woman of her character—the perfecting of a cruel vengeance.

While revolving all this in her mind, she was casting her

eyes around her, and arranging in her head the topography of the garden. Milady was like a good general, who looks out alike for victory and defeat, and is quite prepared, according to the chances of the battle, to march forward or to beat a retreat.

At the end of an hour she heard a sweet voice calling her. It was Madame Bonacieux's. The good abbess had naturally consented to everything; and as a beginning they were to sup together.

On reaching the court-yard, they heard the noise of a carriage stopping at the gate.

Milady listened.

"Do you hear?" said she.

"Yes, the rolling of a carriage."

"It is the one my brother sends for us."

"Oh! my God!"

"Come; come! Courage!"

The bell of the convent gate rung — milady was not mistaken.

"Go up to your chamber," said she to Madame Bonacieux; "of course you have some jewels you would like to take with you."

"I have his letters," said she.

"Well, go get them, and come to my room; we will have a bite of supper. We shall travel part of the night, perhaps, and must keep our strength up."

"Great heavens!" said Madame Bonacieux, placing her hand on her bosom; "my heart beats so I cannot walk."

"Courage, my dear, courage! Remember that in a quarter of an hour you will be safe; and think that what you are about to do is for his sake."

"Yes, yes, everything for his sake. You have restored my courage by a single word. Go, I will be with you directly."

Milady hastily ran up to her room. There she found Rochefort's lackey, and gave him his instructions.

He was to wait at the gate. If by chance the musketeers should appear, the carriage was to drive off as fast as possible, pass round the convent, and go and wait for milady at a little village situated at the other side of the wood. In this case milady was to cross the garden and gain the village on foot. We have already said milady was perfectly acquainted with this part of France.

If the musketeers did not appear, things were to go on as had been agreed. Madame Bonacieux was to get into the

carriage as if to bid her farewell, and she was to take away Madame Bonacieux.

Madame Bonacieux came in, and, to remove all suspicion, if she had any, milady repeated to the lackey, before her, all the last part of her instructions.

Milady asked some questions about the carriage. It was a three-horse chaise driven by a postilion. Rochefort's lackey was to precede it as a courier.

Milady was wrong in fearing that Madame Bonacieux would have any suspicions. The poor young woman was too innocent to suppose that any woman could be guilty of such perfidy. Besides, the name of the Countess Winter, which she had heard the abbess pronounce, was perfectly unknown to her, and she was even ignorant that she had so great and so fatal a share in the misfortunes of her life.

"You see," said she, when the lackey had gone out, "everything is ready. The abbess suspects nothing, and believes that they have come after me by the cardinal's command. The man has gone to give his last orders; take a mouthful to eat, drink a swallow of wine, and let us go."

"Yes," said Madame Bonacieux mechanically; "let us go."

Milady made her a sign to sit down before her, poured out a small glass of Spanish wine for her, and helped her to some of the breast of a chicken.

"See!" said she; "how propitious everything is; here is night coming on; by daybreak we shall have gained our retreat, and no one can have any suspicion where we are. Come, courage! — take something."

Madame Bonacieux ate a few mouthfuls mechanically, and just touched the glass to her lips.

"Come! come!" said milady, lifting hers to her mouth, "do as I do."

But just as she was putting hers to her mouth, her hand remained suspended; she had heard something on the road which sounded like the far-off beat of hoofs approaching; then, almost at the same time, it seemed to her that she heard the neighing of horses.

This noise roused her from her joy as a storm awakens the sleeper in the midst of a beautiful dream. She grew pale and ran to the window, while Madame Bonacieux, rising all of a tremble, leaned on her chair to avoid falling.

Nothing was yet to be seen, only they heard the galloping constantly draw nearer.

"Oh! heavens!" cried Madame Bonacieux, "what is that noise?"

"It is either our friends or our enemies," said milady, with her terrible coolness; "stay where you are — I will tell you."

Madame Bonacieux remained standing, mute, pale, and motionless.

The noise became louder, the horses could not be more than a hundred paces distant. If they were not yet to be seen, it was because the road made a bend. Yet the noise became so distinct that the horses might be counted by the sharply defined sound of their hoofs.

Milady gazed with all her eyes; it was just light enough for her to recognize those who were coming.

Suddenly, at a turn of the road, she saw the glitter of laced hats and the waving of plumes; she counted two, then five, then eight horsemen. One of them was two lengths of his horse in advance of the others.

Milady uttered a stifled groan. In the first horseman she recognized D'Artagnan.

"Oh! heavens! heavens!" cried Madame Bonacieux, "what is it? what is it?"

"It is the cardinal's guards — not an instant to be lost!" cried milady. "Let us fly! let us fly!"

"Yes! yes! let us fly!" repeated Madame Bonacieux, but without being able to take a step, fixed to the spot as she was by terror.

They heard the horsemen riding under the windows.

"Come on, then! do come on!" cried milady, striving to drag the young woman along by the arm. "Thanks to the garden, we yet can escape. I have the key. But let us make haste. In five minutes it will be too late!"

Madame Bonacieux tried to walk, took two steps, and sank on her knees.

Milady strove to lift her up and carry her, but could not succeed.

At this moment they heard the rolling of the carriage, which as soon as the musketeers were seen set off at a gallop. Then three or four shots were fired.

"For the last time, will you come?" cried milady.

"Oh! my God! my God! You see my strength fails me. You see plainly I cannot walk. Escape yourself!"

"Escape myself, and leave you here! No, no, never!" cried milady.

All at once she stopped, a livid flash darted from her eyes.

She ran to the table, poured into Madame Bonacieux's glass the contents of a ring which she opened with singular quickness.

It was a grain of a reddish color, which instantly melted.

Then, taking the glass with a firm hand, —

"Drink," said she; "this wine will give you strength — drink!"

And she put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically.

"This is not the way I wanted to avenge myself," said milady, setting the glass on the table with an infernal smile, "but, faith! one does what one can!"

And she rushed out of the room.

Madame Bonacieux saw her go without being able to follow her. She was like those people who dream they are pursued, and who vainly struggle to walk.

A few moments passed. A frightful noise was heard at the gate. Every instant Madame Bonacieux expected to see milady, but she did not return.

At length she heard the grating of the hinges of the opening gates, the noise of boots and spurs resounded on the stairs. There was a great murmur of voices coming nearer and nearer; it seemed to her she heard her own name pronounced.

All at once she uttered a loud cry of joy, and darted toward the door. She had recognized D'Artagnan's voice.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" cried she, "is it you? This way! this way!"

"Constance! Constance!" replied the young man, "where are you? My God!"

At the same moment the door of the cell yielded to a shock, rather than opened. Several men rushed into the room. Madame Bonacieux had sunk into an arm-chair, without the power of moving.

D'Artagnan threw down a pistol, still smoking, which he held in his hand, and fell on his knees before his mistress. Athos replaced his in his belt. Porthos and Aramis, who held their drawn swords in their hands, returned them to their scabbards.

"Oh! D'Artagnan! my beloved D'Artagnan! You have come, then, at last. You have not deceived me! It is indeed you!"

"Yes, yes, Constance! — reunited."

"Oh! how foolish *she* was to tell me you would not come. I hoped silently. I was not willing to flee. Oh! how rightly I have acted! how happy I am!"

At the word *she*, Athos, who had quietly seated himself, suddenly got up.

"*She!* who?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Why, my companion. She who, out of friendship for me, wished to save me from my persecutors. She who, mistaking you for the cardinal's guards, has just made her escape."

"Your companion?" cried D'Artagnan, becoming paler than his mistress's white veil; "what companion do you mean?"

"She whose carriage was at the gate, a woman who calls herself your friend, D'Artagnan, a woman to whom you have told everything."

"But her name, her name!" cried D'Artagnan; "my God! don't you know her name?"

"Yes, it was pronounced before me. Stop—but—it is strange—oh! my God! my head swims—I cannot see!"

"Help! friends! help! Her hands are like ice," cried D'Artagnan; "she is ill! Great God, she is growing unconscious!"

While Porthos was calling for help at the top of his voice, Aramis ran to the table to get a glass of water. But he stopped at seeing the horrible alteration that had taken place in the face of Athos, who, standing before the table, his hair rising from his head, his eyes fixed in stupor, was looking at one of the glasses and seemed a prey to the most horrible doubt.

"Oh!" said Athos, "oh! no. It is impossible! God would not permit such a crime!"

"Water! water!" cried D'Artagnan; "water!"

"Oh! poor woman! poor woman!" murmured Athos, in a broken voice.

Madame Bonacieux opened her eyes under D'Artagnan's kisses.

"She revives!" cried the young man.

"Madame!" said Athos, "madame, in heaven's name, whose empty glass is this?"

"Mine, sir," said the young woman, in a dying voice.

"But who poured out for you the wine that was in this glass?"

"*She.*"

"But who is *she*?"

"Oh! I remember," said Madame Bonacieux; "the Countess Winter."

The four friends uttered one and the same cry, but the cry of Athos dominated over all the rest.

At that moment Madame Bonacieux's face grew livid, a stifled agony overcame her, and she sank panting into the arms of Porthos and Aramis.

D'Artagnan seized Athos's hand with an anguish difficult to describe.

"What! do you believe — ?"

His voice was stifled by sobs.

"I believe everything," said Athos.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" cried Madame Bonacieux, "where art thou? Do not leave me — thou seest that I am dying!"

D'Artagnan let fall Athos's hand, which he still held convulsively clasped in his, and hastened to her.

Her beautiful face was distorted, her glassy eyes were fixed, a convulsive shuddering shook her body, the sweat stood on her brow.

"In heaven's name, run, call! Aramis! Porthos! call for help!"

"Useless!" said Athos, "useless! For the poison which she pours out, there is no antidote."

"Yes, yes! help! help!" murmured Madame Bonacieux; "help!"

Then, collecting all her strength, she took the young man's head between her hands, looked at him for an instant as if her whole soul had passed into her look, and pressed her lips to his.

"Constance! Constance!" cried D'Artagnan wildly.

A sigh escaped from Madame Bonacieux's mouth and dwelt for an instant on D'Artagnan's lips — that sigh was her soul, so chaste and so loving, reascending to heaven.

D'Artagnan held only a corpse pressed to his heart.

The young man uttered a cry and fell by his mistress's side as pale and as cold as she was.

Porthos wept, Aramis lifted his hand toward heaven, Athos made the sign of the cross.

At that moment a man appeared in the doorway, almost as pale as those in the room, looked round him, saw Madame Bonacieux dead and D'Artagnan fainting.

He appeared just at that moment of stupor which follows great catastrophes.

"I was not mistaken," said he. "Here is M. d'Artagnan, and you are his three friends, MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

The persons whose names had just been pronounced looked

at the stranger in astonishment. All three thought they knew him.

"Gentlemen," resumed the new comer, "you are, as I am, in search of a woman, who," added he, with a terrible smile, "must have passed this way, for I see a corpse here!"

The three friends remained mute. But the voice, as well as the face, reminded them of a man they had seen, and yet they could not remember in what circumstances.

"Gentlemen," continued the stranger, "since you will not recognize a man who probably owes his life to you twice, I must name myself: I am the Lord Winter, that woman's brother-in-law."

The three friends uttered a cry of surprise.

Athos rose and offered him his hand.

"You are welcome, milord," said he; "you are one of our friends."

"I left Portsmouth five hours after her," said Lord Winter. "I arrived three hours after her at Boulogne, I missed her by twenty minutes at St. Omer. At last at Lilliers I lost trace of her. I was going about at haphazard, inquiring of every one, when I saw you gallop by. I recognized M. d'Artagnan. I called to you; you did not answer; I tried to follow you, but my horse was too tired to go at the same rate as yours. And yet it seems that, in spite of all your diligence, you still arrived too late."

"You see!" said Athos, pointing to Madame Bonacieux dead, and to D'Artagnan, whom Porthos and Aramis were trying to recall to life.

"Are they both dead?" asked Lord Winter coldly.

"No," replied Athos; "fortunately, M. d'Artagnan has only fainted."

"Ah! so much the better!" said Lord Winter.

At that moment D'Artagnan opened his eyes.

He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis, and threw himself like a madman on his mistress's dead body.

Athos rose, walked up to his friend with a slow and solemn step, kissed him tenderly, and, as he burst into violent sobs, said to him, with his noble and persuasive voice:

"Friend, be a man! Women weep for the dead, men avenge them!"

"Oh, yes!" cried D'Artagnan, "yes! If it is to avenge her, I am ready to follow you."

Athos took advantage of this moment of strength, which the hope of vengeance restored to his unfortunate friend, to make

a sign to Porthos and Aramis to go and fetch the mother superior.

The two friends met her in the corridor, still in great anxiety and agitation at such events. She summoned some of the nuns, who contrary to all convent customs found themselves in the presence of five men.

"Madame," said Athos, passing his arm under D'Artagnan's, "we abandon to your pious care the body of this unfortunate woman. Treat her as one of your sisterhood. We will return some day to pray over her grave!"

D'Artagnan hid his face in Athos's bosom, and burst into sobs.

"Weep!" said Athos, "weep! Heart full of love, youth, and life! Alas! would that I could weep as thou dost!"

And, affectionate as a father, consoling as a priest, great as a man who has suffered much, he drew away his friend.

All five, followed by their lackeys leading their horses, took their way to the town of Béthune, the outlying houses of which they saw, and stopped at the first inn to which they came.

"But," said D'Artagnan, "are we not to pursue that woman?"

"Presently," said Athos; "I have certain measures to take."

"She will escape us," replied the young man; "she will escape us, Athos, and it will be your fault."

"I will answer for her," said Athos.

D'Artagnan had such trust in his friend's word that he bowed his head, and entered the inn without making a reply.

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, not at all understanding Athos's confidence.

Lord Winter thought he spoke in this way to assuage D'Artagnan's sorrow.

"Now, gentlemen," said Athos, when he had ascertained there were five vacant rooms in the hotel, "let us each retire to his own chamber. D'Artagnan needs to be alone, to weep and to sleep. I take charge of everything. Do not worry."

"It seems to me, however," said Lord Winter, "that if there are any measures to be taken against the countess, it concerns me; she is my sister-in-law."

"Me also!" said Athos; "she is my wife."

D'Artagnan smiled, for he realized that Athos was sure of his vengeance since he revealed such a secret. Porthos and Aramis looked at each other. Lord Winter thought Athos was mad.

"Now, all go to your rooms," said Athos, "and leave me to act. You must perceive that in my quality of a husband this concerns me. Only, D'Artagnan, if you have not lost it, give me the piece of paper which fell from that man's hat. The name of the village of — is written on it."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I understand now; that name written in her hand —"

"You see," said Athos, "there is a God in heaven!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE MAN IN THE RED CLOAK.

ATHOS's despair had given place to a concentrated grief, which made this man's brilliant mental faculties keener than ever.

Possessed by a single thought, that of the promise he had made, and of the responsibility he had assumed, he was the last to retire to his room. He begged the host to get him a map of the province, bent over it, examined the lines traced on it, perceived that there were four different roads from Béthune to Armentières, and called the valets.

Planchet, Grimaud, Bazin, and Mousqueton presented themselves, and received Athos's clear, positive, and serious orders: they were to set out the next morning at daybreak, and to go to Armentières — each by a different route. Planchet, the most intelligent of the four, was to follow the road by which had passed the carriage on which the four friends had fired, and which was accompanied, as will be remembered, by Rochefort's servant.

Athos set the lackeys to work first, because, since these men had been in the service of himself and his friends, he had discovered in each of them different and essential qualities.

Besides, lackeys asking questions inspire less mistrust in strangers than their masters, and meet with more sympathies among those to whom they apply.

Finally, milady was acquainted with the masters, but did not know the lackeys; while, on the contrary, the lackeys knew milady perfectly well.

All four were to meet the next day at eleven o'clock. If they had discovered milady's retreat, three were to remain on guard, the fourth was to return to Béthune, to inform Athos and serve as a guide to the four friends.

When these arrangements were made the lackeys retired.

Athos then arose from his chair, girded on his sword, enveloped himself in his cloak, and left the hotel. It was nearly ten o'clock. At ten o'clock in the evening, we know, the streets in provincial towns are very little frequented. Athos, however, was visibly anxious to find some one of whom he could ask a question. At length he met a belated passer-by, went up to him, and spoke a few words to him. The man he addressed drew back in terror, yet he answered the musketeer by a gesture. Athos offered the man half a pistole to go with him, but the man refused.

Athos then plunged into the street the man had indicated with his finger. But on arriving at a cross-way, he stopped again, evidently embarrassed. However, as he had a better chance of meeting some one at the cross-way than anywhere else, he stood still. In fact, after a few minutes a night-watch passed. Athos repeated to him the same question he had asked the first person he had met. The night-watch evinced the same terror, refused, also, to go with Athos, and only showed him with his hand the road he should take.

Athos walked in the direction indicated, and reached the suburb, situated at the end of the city, opposite where he and his friends had entered it. Here he again appeared uneasy and embarrassed, and stopped for the third time.

Fortunately, a beggar passed and came up to Athos to ask charity. Athos offered him a crown to accompany him where he was going. The beggar hesitated at first, but at the sight of the piece of silver glittering in the darkness, he consented, and walked on before Athos.

Reaching the corner of a street, he showed in the distance a small house, isolated, solitary, dismal. Athos went to the house, while the beggar, having received his reward, hurried away as fast as he could walk.

Athos went round the house before he could distinguish the door from the reddish color in which the house was painted. No light shone through the chinks of the shutters, no sound gave reason to believe that it was inhabited. It was dark and silent as a tomb.

Three times Athos knocked and no one responded. At the third knock, however, the door was half-opened, and a man of lofty stature, pale complexion, and black hair and beard appeared.

Athos and he exchanged some words in a low voice. Then the tall man made a sign to the musketeer that he might come

in. Athos immediately took advantage of the permission, and the door closed after him.

The man whom Athos had come so far to seek, and whom he had found with so much trouble, introduced him into his laboratory, where he was engaged in fastening together with iron wire the rattling bones of a skeleton. All the frame was already adjusted. The skull only lay on the table.

All the rest of the furniture indicated that the occupant of this house was engaged in the study of the natural sciences. There were jars filled with snakes labelled according to their species. Dried lizards shone like emeralds, set in great squares of black wood; bunches of wild, odoriferous herbs, doubtless having qualities unknown to ordinary men, were fastened to the ceiling and hung down in the corners of the apartment.

But there was no family, no servant. The tall man dwelt alone in this house.

Athos cast a cold and indifferent glance on all the objects we have described, and, at the invitation of the man he came to seek, sat down near him.

Then he explained to him the cause of his visit, and the service he required of him. But scarcely had he expressed his request, when the unknown, who had remained standing before the musketeer, drew back in terror, and refused. Then Athos took from his pocket a small paper, on which were written two lines, accompanied by a signature and a seal, and presented them to him who had been too premature in showing these signs of repugnance. The tall man had scarcely read the two lines, seen the signature, and recognized the seal, when he bowed to denote that he had no longer any objection to make, and that he was ready to obey.

Athos required no more. He arose, bowed, went out, returned by the same way he had come, reëntered the hotel, and shut himself up in his room.

At daybreak D'Artagnan came to him, and asked him what was to be done.

"Wait!" replied Athos.

Some minutes later, the mother superior of the convent sent to inform the musketeers that the funeral would take place at noon. There was no news of the poisoner, only she must have escaped through the garden, on the sand of which her footsteps could be traced, and the gate of which had been found locked; the key had disappeared.

At the hour appointed, Lord Winter and the four friends repaired to the convent. The bells were tolling solemnly, the

chapel was open, the grating of the choir was closed. In the centre of the choir the body of the victim, clothed in her novitiate dress, was exposed. On each side of the choir, and behind the gratings opening from the convent, were assembled the whole community of the Carmelites, who were listening to the divine service, and mingling their chants with the chants of the priests without seeing the lay auditors or being seen by them.

At the chapel door D'Artagnan felt his courage failing him again, and turned to look for Athos, but Athos had disappeared.

Faithful to his mission of vengeance, Athos had asked to be taken to the garden, and there, on the sand, following the light steps of this woman, who had left a bloody track wherever she had gone, he proceeded as far as the gate leading into the wood, had it opened, and plunged into the forest.

Then all his suspicions were confirmed. The road by which the carriage had disappeared skirted the forest. Athos pursued the road for some time with his eyes fixed on the ground. Slight blood-stains coming from the wound inflicted either on the man who accompanied the carriage as a courier, or from one of the horses, spotted the road. At the end of three-quarters of a league, about fifty paces from Festubert, a larger blood-stain showed. The ground was beaten down by horses. Between the forest and this tell-tale place, a little behind the trampled ground, was the same track of small feet as in the garden. Here the carriage had stopped.

At this place milady had come out of the wood and got into the carriage.

Satisfied with this discovery, which confirmed all his suspicions, Athos returned to the hotel and found Planchet impatiently waiting for him.

Everything was as Athos had foreseen.

Planchet had followed the road, like Athos had noticed the blood-stains, like Athos had remarked the place where the horses had stopped. But he had gone farther than Athos, so that at the village of Festubert, while drinking at an inn, he had learned, without requiring to ask a question, that about half-past eight the evening before, a wounded man, who accompanied a lady travelling in a post-chaise, had been obliged to stop, being unable to proceed. The accident was attributed to robbers who had stopped the chaise in the wood. The man had remained in the village; the woman had taken a relay of horses and continued her journey.

Planchet went in search of the postilion who had driven the chaise, and found him. He had taken the lady as far as Fromelles, and from Fromelles she had set out for Armentières. Planchet took the short cut, and by seven o'clock in the morning was at Armentières.

There was but one hotel, "The Post." Planchet went and presented himself as a lackey out of a place, who was in search of a job. He had not chatted ten minutes with the people of the tavern before he knew that a lady had come there about eleven o'clock the night before, alone; had taken a room, had sent for the steward, and told him that she wanted to stay some time in that neighborhood.

Planchet did not need to know any more. He hastened to the rendezvous, found the three lackeys at their posts, placed them as sentinels at all the doors of the hotel, and came to find Athos, who was just hearing the last of the report when his friends returned.

All their faces were melancholy and anxious, even Aramis's mild face.

"What is to be done?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Wait," replied Athos.

Each one went to his own room.

At eight o'clock in the evening Athos ordered the horses to be saddled, and had Lord Winter and his friends notified to be prepared for the expedition.

In an instant all five were ready. Each examined his arms, and put them in order. Athos was last to come down, and found D'Artagnan already on horseback and impatient.

"Patience!" cried Athos; "one of us is still lacking."

The four gentlemen looked round them in astonishment, for they vainly wondered who this some one lacking could be.

At this moment Planchet brought Athos's horse. The musketeer leaped lightly into the saddle.

"Wait for me," cried he; "I will be back."

And he set off at a gallop.

In a quarter of an hour he returned, accompanied by a tall man, masked, and enveloped in a large red cloak.

Lord Winter and the three musketeers looked at one another inquiringly. None of them could give the others any information, for all were ignorant who this man was. Nevertheless, they felt that this was as it should be, since the thing was done by Athos's order.

At nine o'clock, guided by Planchet, the little cavalcade set out, following the route the carriage had taken.

It was a melancholy sight, that of these six men, riding silently, each plunged in his own thoughts, sad as despair, sombre as punishment.

CHAPTER LXV.

JUDGMENT.

It was a dark and stormy night. Monstrous clouds were flying across the sky, concealing the light of the stars. The moon would not rise before midnight.

Occasionally, by the light of a lightning flash gleaming along the horizon, the road could be seen stretching before them, white and solitary. Then when the flash became extinct, all relapsed into darkness.

Every instant Athos was calling D'Artagnan back, who constantly rode in advance of the little troop, and compelling him to fall into rank, though in a moment he was ahead again. He had but one thought, which was to go forward, and he went.

They silently rode through the little village of Festubert, where the wounded servant was; then they skirted the wood of Richebourg. When they had reached Herlier, Planchet, who was still acting as guide, turned to the left.

Several times Lord Winter, or Porthos, or Aramis tried to have a word with the man in the red cloak. But at each question put to him he bowed, without making any reply. The travellers then understood that there must be some reason why the unknown kept silence, and ceased speaking to him.

Moreover the storm was increasing, the flashes succeeded each other rapidly, the thunder began to growl, and the wind, precursor of a hurricane, whistled in the plumes and the hair of the horsemen.

The cavalcade rode at their utmost speed.

A little beyond Fromelles the storm burst upon them. They put on their cloaks. They had still three leagues before them, and they rode amid torrents of rain.

D'Artagnan had taken off his hat, and did not put on his cloak. He found it pleasant to let the water trickle over his burning brow, and down his body shaken with feverish chills.

Just as the little troop had passed Goskal, and were approaching The Post, a man, sheltered under a tree, stepped out from its trunk, with which he had been confounded in the darkness, and advanced into the middle of the road, with his finger on his lips.

Athos recognized Grimaud.

"What's the matter?" cried Athos; "has she left Arménitières?"

Grimaud nodded. At a movement made by D'Artagnan:

"Silence, D'Artagnan!" said Athos. "I have taken this whole affair myself, so it is my right to question Grimaud."

"Where is she?" asked Athos.

Grimaud stretched out his hands in the direction of the Lys.

"Far from here?" asked Athos.

Grimaud showed his master his forefinger bent.

"Alone?" asked Athos.

Grimaud made a sign that she was.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "she is alone, within half a league of here, in the direction of the river. 'Tis good! Lead us forward, Grimaud."

Grimaud started off across country, and served as a guide to the cavalcade.

At the end of nearly five hundred paces they came to a brook, which they forded.

By a flash of lightning they saw the village of Enguinhem.

"Is she there, Grimaud?" asked Athos.

Grimaud shook his head.

And the troupe continued their route.

Another flash gleamed. Grimaud stretched out his arm, and by the livid light of the fire-serpent they distinguished a little isolated house on the banks of the river, within a hundred paces of a ferry.

One window was lighted.

"Here we are!" said Athos.

At this moment a man who had been crouching in a ditch jumped up. It was Mousqueton. He pointed his finger to the lighted window.

"She's there," said he.

"And Bazin?" asked Athos.

"While I was watching the window, he was watching the door."

"Good!" said Athos; "you are all faithful servants."

Athos leaped down from his horse, gave the bridle to Grimaud, and advanced toward the window, after having made a sign to the rest of the troop to go toward the door.

The little house was surrounded by a quickset hedge two or three feet high. Athos sprang over the hedge and went up to the window, which was without shutters, but had the half-curtains drawn to closely.

He got upon the stone coping, in order to see over the top of the curtain.

By the light of the lamp he saw a woman wrapped in a dark mantle sitting on a stool near a dying fire. Her elbows rested on a mean table, and she leaned her head on her two hands, which were white as ivory.

Her face was not distinguishable, but an ominous smile passed over Athos's lips. There was no mistaking. It was indeed she whom he sought.

At this moment a horse neighed, Milady raised her head, saw Athos's pale face close to the window, and screamed.

Athos saw he was recognized, pushed the window with his knee and hand. It yielded; the panes broke.

And Athos, like the spectre of vengeance, sprang into the room.

Milady ran to the door and opened it; but, paler and more threatening still than Athos, D'Artagnan stood on the threshold.

Milady drew back, uttering a cry. D'Artagnan, believing she might have means of flight, and fearing lest she should escape them, drew a pistol from his belt. But Athos raised his hand:

"Put back your weapon, D'Artagnan," said he; "this woman must be judged and not assassinated. Wait but a moment longer, my friend, and you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen."

D'Artagnan obeyed, for Athos had the solemn voice and the mighty gesture of a judge sent by the Lord himself. So, behind D'Artagnan, entered Porthos, Aramis, Lord Winter, and the man in the red cloak.

The four lackeys guarded the door and the window.

Milady had sunk into a chair, with her hands extended, as if to conjure away this terrible apparition. On perceiving her brother-in-law, she uttered a terrible cry.

"What do you want?" screamed milady.

"We want," said Athos, "Charlotte Backson, who first was called Comtesse de La Fère, and afterwards Lady Winter, Baroness of Sheffield."

"I am she! I am she!" murmured she, at the height of terror. "What do you want of me?"

"We intend to judge you according to your crimes," said Athos. "You shall be free to defend yourself. Justify yourself if you can. Monsieur D'Artagnan, it is for you to accuse her first."

D'Artagnan stepped forward.

"Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of poisoning Constance Bonacieux, who died yesterday evening."

He turned to Porthos and Aramis.

"We bear witness to this," said the two musketeers, with one impulse.

D'Artagnan continued:

"Before God and before men, I accuse this woman of having tried to poison me by wine which she sent me from Villeroi, with a forged letter, purporting that the wine came from my friends. God preserved me, but a man named Brisemont died in my place."

"We bear witness to this," said Porthos and Aramis, in the same voice.

"Before God and before men I accuse this woman of having urged me to murder the Baron de Wardes. But as no one is present to bear witness to the truth of this accusation, I attest it myself. I have done."

And M. d'Artagnan passed to the other side of the room with Porthos and Aramis.

"It is your turn, milord," said Athos.

The baron came forward.

"Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having caused the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham."

"The Duke of Buckingham assassinated!" cried all present, with one voice.

"Yes," said the baron, "assassinated. On receiving the warning letter you wrote to me, I had this woman arrested, and put her in the charge of a loyal servant. She corrupted this man, she placed the dagger in his hand, she made him kill the duke. And at this moment, perhaps, Felton is paying with his life for this fury's crime!"

A shudder crept through the judges at the revelation of these crimes of which they had not yet heard.

"This is not all," proceeded Lord Winter; "my brother who made you his heir, died in three hours, of a strange disorder, which left livid traces over all his body. Sister, how did your husband die?"

"Horror!" cried Porthos and Aramis.

"Buckingham's assassin, Felton's assassin, my brother's assassin, I demand justice upon you, and I swear that if it be not granted to me, I will execute it myself."

And Lord Winter ranged himself by D'Artagnan's side, leaving his place free for another accuser.

Milady buried her face in her two hands, and tried to recall her ideas, confused in a mortal vertigo.

"It is my turn," said Athos, himself trembling as the lion trembles at the sight of the serpent; "it is my turn. I married this woman when she was a young girl. I married her in spite of all my family. I gave her my wealth, I gave her my name; and one day I discovered that this woman was branded; this woman was marked with a fleur-de-lis on her left shoulder."

"Oh!" said milady, "I defy you to find the tribunal which pronounced that infamous sentence upon me. I defy you to find him who executed it."

"Silence!" said a voice. "It is for me to reply to that!"

And the man in the red cloak came forward in his turn.

"Who is this man? who is this man?" cried milady. She was suffocated by terror; her hair, which had become undone, seemed to stand up over her livid countenance as if it were alive.

All eyes were fixed on this man, for to all except Athos he was unknown.

Even Athos looked at him with as much stupefaction as the others, for he knew not how he could in any way be mixed up with the horrible drama which was at that moment coming to its climax.

After approaching milady with a slow and solemn step, so that the table alone separated them, the unknown took off his mask.

Milady for some time examined with increasing terror his pale face, framed in its black hair and beard, and the only expression of which was icy sternness. Then all at once,—

"Oh! no, no!" cried she, rising and retreating to the very wall; "no, no! it is an infernal apparition! It is not he! Help, help!" she screamed in a hoarse voice, turning to the wall as if she could tear an opening in it with her hands.

"But who are you, then?" cried all the witnesses of this scene.

"Ask this woman," said the man in the red cloak; "for you see well enough she knows me!"

"The executioner of Lille! the executioner of Lille!" cried milady, a prey to wild terror, and clinging with her hands to the wall to avoid falling.

Every one drew back, and the man in the red cloak remained standing alone in the middle of the room.

"Oh! forgive me! pardon! pardon!" cried the wretched woman, falling on her knees.

The unknown waited for silence.

"I told you so — that she knew me," he went on to say. "Yes, I am the executioner of the city of Lille, and here is my story."

All eyes were fixed upon this man; his words were awaited with anxious eagerness.

"This young woman when she was a young maiden was as beautiful as she is now. She was a nun in the convent of the Benedictines of Templemar. A young priest, of a simple and believing heart, was the chaplain of that convent. She undertook to seduce him, and succeeded; she would have seduced a saint.

"The vows of both were sacred — irrevocable. Their intrigue could not last long without ruining both. She prevailed on him to leave the country; but for them to leave the country, to escape together, to reach another part of France, where they might live at ease, because there they would be unknown, money was necessary. Neither of them had any. The priest stole the sacred utensils and sold them. But as they were preparing to escape together, they were both arrested.

"Within a week she seduced the jailer's son and escaped. The young priest was condemned to ten years in chains, and to be branded. I was executioner of the city of Lille, as this woman has said. I was obliged to brand the guilty man, and the guilty man, gentlemen, was my brother!

"I then swore that this woman who had ruined him, who was more than his accomplice, since she had spurred him on to commit the crime, should share at least his punishment. I suspected the place where she was concealed. I followed her, I caught her, I bound her, and I imprinted the same disgraceful mark on her that I had imprinted on my poor brother.

"The day after my return to Lille, my brother, in his turn, succeeded in making his escape. I was accused of complicity, and was condemned to stay in prison in his place till he should be again a prisoner. My poor brother was ignorant of my condemnation. He had rejoined this woman; they fled together into Berry, and there he obtained a little curacy. This woman passed for his sister.

"The lord of the estate on which the curate's church was situated saw this pretended sister, and fell in love with her, so sincerely that he offered to marry her. Then she left the man

whom she had ruined for the man whom she was destined to ruin, and became the Comtesse de La Fère — ”

All eyes were turned toward Athos, whose real name this was. He bowed his head in token that all that the executioner had said was true.

“Then,” resumed the other, “mad, desperate, determined to get rid of an existence from which she had taken away everything, both honor and happiness, my poor brother returned to Lille, and, learning the sentence that had condemned me in his place, gave himself up, and hanged himself that same night from the air-hole of his dungeon cell.

“I must say, in justice, they who had condemned me kept their word. As soon as the identity of the body was proved, I was set at liberty.

“That is the crime of which I accuse her. That is the cause of her being branded.”

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Athos, “what penalty do you demand against this woman?”

“The penalty of death,” replied D’Artagnan.

“Milord de Winter,” continued Athos, “what penalty do you demand against this woman?”

“The penalty of death,” replied Lord Winter.

“MM. Porthos and Aramis,” repeated Athos, “you who are her judges, what penalty do you pronounce on this woman?”

“The penalty of death,” replied the musketeers, in a hollow voice.

Milady uttered a frightful shriek, and dragged herself along on her knees several paces toward her judges.

Athos stretched out his hand toward her.

“Charlotte Backson, Comtesse de La Fère, Milady de Winter,” said he, “your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know any prayer, say it; for you are condemned, and you shall die.”

At these words, which left her no hope, milady rose to her full height and tried to speak, but her strength failed her. She felt that a powerful and implacable hand was seizing her by the hair, and was dragging her away as irrevocably as fate drags man. She did not, therefore, even attempt to make any resistance, and went out of the cottage.

Lord Winter, D’Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis followed her. The lackeys followed their masters, and the room was left desolate, with its broken window, its open door, and its smoky lamp burning forlornly on the table.

CHAPTER LXVI.

EXECUTION.

It was almost midnight. The moon, hollowed by its waning and red as blood under the last traces of the storm, was rising behind the little town of Armentières, which outlined against its pallid light the dark silhouette of its houses and the skeleton of its high carved belfry. In front of them the Lys was rolling its waters like a river of molten lead, while on the other bank could be seen a black mass of trees, outlined against a stormy sky, which was invaded by huge coppery clouds, creating a kind of twilight amid the night. On the left was an old abandoned windmill, with motionless vans, from the ruins of which an owl was emitting its shrill, periodical, and monotonous cry. Here and there in the plain, on the right and on the left of the road, which the dismal procession followed, appeared a few low, stunted trees looking like deformed dwarfs crouching down as if to watch men at this ominous hour.

From time to time a broad sheet of lightning opened the horizon in its whole width, zigzagged over the black mass of trees, and came like a terrible cimeter, cutting the sky and the water into two parts. Not a breath of wind disturbed the heavy atmosphere. A deathlike silence oppressed all nature. The soil was humid and glistening with the rain which had just fallen, and the refreshed herbs distilled their perfume with increased energy.

Two of the lackeys dragged milady along, each taking one of her arms. The executioner walked behind them, and Lord Winter, D'Artagnan, Porthos, and Aramis walked behind the executioner.

Planchet and Bazin came last.

The two lackeys led milady toward the river. Her mouth was mute, but her eyes spoke with their inexpressible eloquence, supplicating by turns each of those on whom she looked.

When she found herself a few paces in advance, she whispered to the lackeys:

"A thousand pistoles to each of you, if you will protect my flight. But if you deliver me up to your masters, I have at hand avengers who will make you pay dearly for my death."

Grimaud hesitated; Mousqueton trembled in all his limbs.

Athos, hearing milady's voice, came up quickly; Lord Winter did the same.

"Send off these lackeys," said he; "she has spoken to them; they are no longer safe."

Planchet and Bazin were summoned, and took the places of Grimaud and Mousqueton.

When they reached the banks of the river, the executioner approached milady and bound her hands and her feet.

Then she broke silence to cry out:

"You are cowards, you are miserable assassins! It takes ten men of you to murder one woman. Beware! If I am not rescued I shall be avenged."

"You are not a woman," said Athos coldly. "You do not belong to the human species. You are a demon escaped from hell, and we are going to send you back again."

"Ah! you virtuous men!" exclaimed milady; "but remember that he who touches a hair of my head is himself an assassin."

"The executioner can kill, madame, without being on that account an assassin," said the man in the red cloak, striking on his immense sword. "He is the last judge; that is all."

And as he was binding her while saying these words, milady uttered two or three wild cries, which produced a strange effect, flying away into the night and losing themselves in the depth of the woods.

"But if I am guilty, if I have committed the crimes you charge me with," shrieked milady, "take me before a tribunal. You are not judges, you, to condemn me!"

"I offered you Tyburn," said Lord Winter; "why did you not accept it?"

"Because I do not want to die!" cried milady, writhing; "because I am too young to die!"

"The woman you poisoned at Béthune was even younger than you, madame, and yet she is dead," said D'Artagnan.

"I will enter a cloister, I will become a nun," said milady.

"You were in a cloister," said the executioner, "and you left it to destroy my brother."

Milady uttered a cry of terror and sank on her knees.

The executioner lifted her up by her arms, and was carrying her toward the boat.

"Oh! my God!" cried she, "my God! Are you going to drown me?"

These cries had something so heart-rending in them that D'Artagnan, who had been at first the most implacable against

milady, sank down on a stump and bent his head, covering his ears with the palms of his hands; and yet, notwithstanding this, he still heard her threaten and cry.

D'Artagnan was the youngest of all these men; his heart failed him.

"Oh! I cannot behold this frightful spectacle! I cannot consent that this woman should die thus!"

Milady heard these few words, and caught at a gleam of hope.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" cried she, "remember I loved you!"

The young man rose and took a step toward her.

But Athos arose, drew his sword, placed himself in front of him.

"If you take one step farther, D'Artagnan," said he, "we cross swords."

M. D'Artagnan fell on his knees and prayed.

"Come!" continued Athos; "executioner, do your duty."

"Willingly, monseigneur," said the executioner; "for as true as I am a good Catholic, I firmly believe I am right in performing my functions on this woman."

"'Tis well."

Athos took a step toward milady.

"I pardon you," said he, "the ill you have done me; I pardon you for my blasted future, my lost honor, my defiled love, and my salvation forever compromised by the despair into which you have cast me. Die in peace!"

Lord Winter advanced next.

"I pardon you," said he, "the poisoning of my brother, the assassination of his Grace the Duke of Buckingham; I pardon you poor Felton's death. I pardon you the attempts on me personally. Die in peace."

"And I," said D'Artagnan. "Pardon me, madame, for having by deceit, unworthy of a gentleman, provoked your anger; and in exchange I pardon you the murder of my poor sweetheart and your cruel vengeance against me. I pardon you, and I weep for you. Die in peace."

"I am lost!" murmured milady, in English; "I must die!"

Then she rose of her own accord, and cast around her one of those keen looks which seemed to dart from a flaming eye.

She saw nothing.

She listened; she heard nothing.

She had only enemies around her.

"Where am I to die?" she asked.

"On the other bank," replied the executioner.

Then he made her enter the boat, and just as he was going to set foot in it himself, Athos handed him a sum of money.

"Here," said he, "is the price of the execution, that it may be plain we are acting as judges."

"Very well," said the executioner; "and now, in her turn, let this woman see that I am not fulfilling my trade, but my duty."

And he threw the money into the river.

The boat moved off toward the left bank of the Lys, bearing the guilty woman and the executioner. All the others remained on the right bank, where they had fallen on their knees.

The boat glided along the ferry-rope under the gleam of a pale cloud which hung over the water at the moment.

It was seen reaching the opposite bank; the figures were outlined in black against the red-tinted horizon.

Milady, during the passage, had contrived to untie the cord which fastened her feet; on reaching the bank, she jumped lightly on shore and took to flight.

But the soil was moist; when she reached the top of the bank, she slipped and fell on her knees.

A superstitious idea struck her: she realized that heaven denied her its aid, and she remained in the attitude in which she had fallen, with her head drooping and her hands clasped.

Then from the other bank the executioner was seen to raise both his arms slowly. A moonbeam fell on the blade of his broad sword. His two arms fell: they heard the hissing of the cimeter and the victim's cry; then a truncated mass sank under the blow.

The executioner then took off his red cloak, spread it on the ground, laid the body in it, threw in the head, tied it by the four corners, lifted it on his shoulder, and got into the boat again.

In the middle of the stream he stopped the boat, and holding his burden over the water, —

"Let the justice of God be done!" cried he, in a loud voice.

And he let the body drop into the depths of the waters, which closed over it.

Three days later the four musketeers were in Paris again. They had not exceeded their leave of absence, and that same evening went to pay their customary visit to M. de Tréville.

"Well, gentlemen," asked the excellent captain, "have you enjoyed your excursion?"

"Prodigiously!" replied Athos, for himself and his companions.

CONCLUSION.

ON the sixth of the following month, the king, in compliance with the promise he had made the cardinal to leave Paris and to return to Rochelle, departed from his capital, unable to recover from his amazement at the news which was just beginning to spread abroad, that Buckingham had been assassinated.

Though warned that the man she had loved so fondly was in danger, the queen, when his death was announced to her, would not lend credence to it; she was even imprudent enough to exclaim:

"It is false: he has just written to me!"

But the next day she was obliged to believe this fatal intelligence. La Porte, detained in England, as every one else had been, by the orders of King Charles I., arrived, bringing the last, the funereal present which Buckingham sent to the queen.

The king's joy had been very lively. He did not trouble to dissemble it, but even displayed it with affectation before the queen. Louis XIII., like all weak minds, was wanting in generosity.

But the king soon became dull and indisposed again; his brow was not one of the kind that are serene for any length of time. He felt that by returning to his camp he was about to become a slave again, and yet nevertheless he returned.

The cardinal was for him the fascinating serpent, and he was the bird flying from branch to branch without being able to escape.

So the return to Rochelle was profoundly dull. Our four friends, in particular, astonished their comrades. They travelled together, side by side, with melancholy eyes and hanging heads. Athos alone, from time to time, raised his broad brow. A flash kindled in his eyes, a bitter smile passed over his lips. Then, like his comrades, he again resumed his reveries.

When the escort arrived in a city, as soon as they had escorted the king to his lodgings the four friends either retired to their own quarters, or to some secluded tavern, where

they neither drank nor played. They only conversed in a low voice, looking around attentively that no one overheard them.

One day, when the king had halted on the way to fly the magpie, and the four friends, according to their custom, instead of following the sport, had stopped at a tavern on the turnpike, a man, riding full speed from Rochelle, pulled up at the door to drink a glass of wine, and glanced into the room where the four musketeers were sitting at table.

"Hello! Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said he; "isn't it you I see in there?"

D'Artagnan raised his head and uttered a cry of joy. It was the man he called his phantom, it was the stranger of Meung, of the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and of Arras.

D'Artagnan drew his sword and sprang toward the door.

But this time, instead of eluding him, the stranger leaped from his horse and advanced to meet D'Artagnan.

"Ah! sir!" said the young man, "I meet you, then, at last! This time you shall not escape me!"

"Neither is it my intention, sir, for this time I was seeking you. I arrest you in the name of the king. I tell you that you must surrender your sword to me, sir, and that without resistance. Your life depends upon it. I warn you."

"But who are you?" demanded D'Artagnan, lowering the point of his sword, but without yet surrendering it.

"I am the Chevalier de Rochefort," answered the stranger, "Cardinal Richelieu's equerry, and I have orders to conduct you to his Eminence."

"We are returning to his Eminence, chevalier," said Athos, advancing; "and you will be good enough to accept M. d'Artagnan's word that he will go straight to Rochelle."

"I must place him in the hands of guards who will take him to camp."

"We will serve as his guards, sir, on our word as gentlemen; but, on our word as gentlemen, likewise," added Athos, "M. d'Artagnan shall not leave us."

The Chevalier de Rochefort cast a glance backward, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had taken their places between him and the door. He perceived that he was completely at the mercy of these four men.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if M. d'Artagnan will surrender his sword to me and join his word to yours, I shall be satisfied with your promise to convey M. d'Artagnan to the cardinal's quarters."

"You have my word, sir, and here is my sword."

"This suits me all the better," said Rochefort, "as I must continue my journey."

"If it is to rejoin milady," said Athos coolly, "it is useless; you will not find her."

"What has become of her?" asked Rochefort eagerly.

"Come back with us to the camp, and you shall know."

Rochefort remained thoughtful for a moment; then, as they were only a day's journey from Surgères, where the cardinal was coming to meet the king, he resolved to follow Athos's advice and go back with them.

Besides, this return gave him the advantage of watching over his prisoner.

They resumed their route.

At three o'clock the next afternoon they reached Surgères. The cardinal was there awaiting Louis XIII. The minister and the king exchanged numerous caresses, congratulating each other on the fortunate chance which had freed France from the implacable enemy who had been rousing all Europe against her. After this the cardinal, who had been informed by Rochefort that D'Artagnan was arrested, and who was anxious to see him, took leave of the king, inviting him to come the next day to view the works on the dyke, which were completed.

The cardinal, on returning in the evening to his headquarters at the bridge of La Pierre, found D'Artagnan without his sword, and the three musketeers armed, standing before the door of the house which he was occupying.

This time, as he was well attended, he looked at them sternly, and made a sign with his eye and hand for D'Artagnan to follow him.

D'Artagnan obeyed.

"We shall wait for you, D'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the cardinal to hear him.

His Eminence kept on his way without uttering a single word.

D'Artagnan entered after the cardinal, and behind D'Artagnan the door was guarded.

His Eminence went to the room which served him as a study, and made a sign to Rochefort to bring in the young musketeer.

Rochefort obeyed and retired.

D'Artagnan remained alone before the cardinal. This was his second interview with Richelieu, and he afterwards confessed that he felt sure it would be his last.

Richelieu remained standing, leaning against the mantel-piece. A table was between him and D'Artagnan.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "you have been arrested by my orders."

"So I have been told, monseigneur."

"Do you know why?"

"No, monseigneur, for the only thing for which I could be arrested is still unknown to your Eminence."

Richelieu looked steadfastly at the young man.

"Indeed!" said he; "what does that mean!"

"If monseigneur will first tell me what crimes I am charged with, I will then tell the deeds that I have done."

"You are charged with crimes that have brought down far loftier heads than yours, sir," said the cardinal.

"What are they, monseigneur?" demanded D'Artagnan, with a calmness that astonished the cardinal himself.

"You are charged with having corresponded with the enemies of the kingdom. You are charged with having surprised state secrets. You are charged with having tried to thwart your general's plans."

"And who charges me with this, monseigneur?" said D'Artagnan, who suspected the accusation came from milady. "A woman branded by the law of the country; a woman who was married to one man in France and to another in England; a woman who poisoned her second husband, and who attempted to poison me!"

"What is all this, sir?" cried the cardinal, astonished; "and what woman are you speaking of thus?"

"Of Milady de Winter," replied D'Artagnan; "yes, of Milady de Winter, of whose many crimes your Eminence was doubtless ignorant when you honored her with your confidence."

"Sir," said the cardinal, "if Milady de Winter has committed the crimes which you say, she shall be punished."

"She is punished, monseigneur."

"And who has punished her?"

"We."

"Is she in prison?"

"She is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the cardinal, who could not believe what he heard. "Dead! Did you say she was dead?"

"Three times she tried to kill me, and I pardoned her. But she killed the woman I loved. Then my friends and I took her, tried her, and condemned her."

D'Artagnan then related the poisoning of Madame Bonacieux in the Carmelite convent of Béthune, the trial in the lonely house, and the execution on the banks of the Lys.

A shudder ran through the cardinal's body, and yet he did not shudder readily.

But suddenly, as if under the influence of a secret thought, the cardinal's face, till that moment gloomy, began gradually to grow serene, and at last recovered the most perfect serenity.

"So," said the cardinal, in a tone the mildness of which contrasted with the severity of his words, "you have constituted yourselves judges, forgetting that they who punish without license to punish are assassins?"

"Monseigneur, I swear to you that I have never for an instant had the intention of defending my head against you. I will submit to the punishment your Eminence may please to inflict upon me. I do not hold life dear enough to be afraid of death."

"Yes, I know you are a man of courage, sir," said the cardinal, in a tone almost affectionate; "I can therefore tell you beforehand you shall be tried, even condemned."

"Another might reply to your Eminence that he had his pardon in his pocket. I shall content myself with saying, Command, monseigneur; I am ready."

"Your pardon?" said Richelieu, surprised.

"Yes, monseigneur," said D'Artagnan.

"And signed by whom — by the king?"

And the cardinal pronounced these words with a singular expression of contempt.

"No; by your Eminence."

"By me? You are mad, sir!"

"Monseigneur will doubtless recognize his own writing."

And D'Artagnan presented to the cardinal the precious paper which Athos had forced from milady, and which he had given to D'Artagnan to serve him as a safeguard.

His Eminence took the paper and read in a slow voice, dwelling on every syllable:

"By my order and for the good of the State the bearer hereof has done what he has done."

"At the camp of Rochelle, August 5, 1628."

"RICHELIEU."

The cardinal, after reading these two lines, fell into deep thought, but he did not return the paper to D'Artagnan.

"He is meditating by what sort of punishment he shall put

me to death," said D'Artagnan to himself. "Very well! On my faith, he shall see how a gentleman can die!"

The young musketeer was in an excellent disposition to die like a hero.

Richelieu still continued thinking, twisting and untwisting the paper in his hands. At last he raised his head, fixed his eagle look upon D'Artagnan's frank, loyal, intelligent face, read on his face, furrowed with tears, all the sufferings he had endured for a month, and reflected for the third or fourth time what a future this young man had before him, and what resources his activity, his courage, and his understanding could devote to a good master.

On the other hand, milady's crimes, her strength of mind, and her infernal genius had more than once terrified him. He felt something like a secret joy at being forever rid of such a dangerous accomplice.

He slowly tore the paper which D'Artagnan had generously placed in his hand.

"I am lost!" said D'Artagnan to himself.

And he bowed low before the cardinal, like a man who says, "Lord, thy will be done!"

The cardinal went to the table, and, without sitting down, wrote a few lines on a parchment two-thirds of which was already filled up, and affixed his seal to it.

"That is my condemnation," thought D'Artagnan; "he will spare me the tedium of the Bastille or the slow processes of a trial. It's another proof of his kindness."

"Here, sir," said the cardinal to the young man, "I have taken from you one signed blank and I give you another. The name is wanting in this commission, and you yourself will write it in."

D'Artagnan took the paper hesitatingly, and cast his eyes over it.

It was a lieutenant's commission in the musketeers.

D'Artagnan fell at the cardinal's feet.

"Monseigneur," said he, "my life is yours! Henceforward dispose of it. But I do not deserve this favor which you bestow on me; I have three friends who are more meritorious and more worthy —"

"You are an honest fellow, D'Artagnan," interrupted the cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, charmed at having subdued this rebellious nature. "Do with this commission what you will. Only remember that, though the name is left blank, I give it to you."

"I shall never forget it," replied D'Artagnan; "your Eminence may be certain of that."

The cardinal turned round and said in a loud voice:

"Rochefort!"

The chevalier, who doubtless was behind the door, entered immediately.

"Rochefort," said the cardinal, "you see M. d'Artagnan: I receive him among the number of my friends. Shake hands then, and be prudent, if you wish to preserve your heads."

Rochefort and D'Artagnan saluted each other distantly, but the cardinal was there observing them with his vigilant eye.

They left the chamber at the same time.

"We shall meet again, shall we not, sir?"

"When you please," said D'Artagnan.

"An opportunity will offer," replied Rochefort.

"What's that?" said the cardinal, opening the door.

The two men smiled at each other, shook hands, and bowed to his Eminence.

"We were beginning to grow impatient," said Athos.

"Here I am, friends," replied D'Artagnan, "not only free, but in favor."

"Will you tell us about it?"

"This evening."

Accordingly, that same evening D'Artagnan repaired to the quarters of Athos, whom he found in a fair way of emptying his bottle of Spanish wine, an occupation which he religiously fulfilled every night.

He related what had taken place between the cardinal and himself, and, drawing the commission from his pocket, —

"Here, my dear Athos," said he, "this naturally belongs to you."

Athos smiled his sweet, fascinating smile.

"My friend," said he, "for Athos this is too much, for the Comte de La Fère it is too little. Keep the commission — it is yours. Alas! my God! it has cost you enough."

D'Artagnan left Athos's room and went to Porthos's.

He found him dressed in a magnificent coat covered with splendid embroidery, looking at himself in a glass.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Porthos; "it is you, dear friend. How do you think these garments fit me?"

"Wonderfully well," said D'Artagnan; "but I have come to offer you a suit which will suit you still better."

"What's that?" asked Porthos.

"That of a lieutenant in the musketeers."

D'Artagnan related to Porthos his interview with the cardinal, and, taking the commission from his pocket, —

"Here, my dear," said he, "write your name in it, and become my officer."

Porthos cast his eyes over the commission, and returned it to D'Artagnan, to the young man's great astonishment.

"Yes," said he, "yes, that would flatter me very much, but I should not have time enough to enjoy the distinction. During our expedition to Béthune my duchess's husband died, so that, my dear, since the coffer of the defunct is holding out its arms to me, I am going to marry the widow. Look here — I was trying on my wedding suit. Keep your lieutenancy, my dear, keep it."

And he returned the commission to D'Artagnan.

The young man entered Aramis's apartment.

He found him kneeling before a praying-desk with his head leaning on an open prayer-book.

He described to him his interview with the cardinal, and, for the third time drawing his commission from his pocket, —

"You, our friend, our intelligence, our invisible protector," said he, "accept this commission. You have deserved it more than any one by your wisdom and your counsels, which were always followed by such happy results."

"Alas! dear friend," said Aramis, "our recent adventures have entirely disgusted me with life and with the sword. This time my determination is irrevocably taken. After the siege I shall enter the house of the Lazarists. Keep the commission, D'Artagnan. The profession of arms suits you. You will be a brave and gallant captain."

D'Artagnan, his eye moist with gratitude and beaming with joy, went back to Athos, whom he found still at table, contemplating the charms of his last glass of Malaga by the light of his lamp.

"Well," said he, "and they also have refused this commission!"

"Because, dear friend, no one is more worthy of it than yourself."

And he took a pen, wrote D'Artagnan's name on the commission, and returned it to him.

"I shall then no longer have any friends," said the young man. "Alas! nothing more, only bitter recollections."

And he let his head sink into his hands, while two tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You are young," replied Athos, "and your bitter recollections have time to be changed into sweet memories."

EPILOGUE.

ROCHELLE, deprived of the aid of the English fleet and the reinforcements promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a siege of a year. On the 28th of October, 1628, the capitulation was signed.

The king made his entrance into Paris on December 23, the same year. He was received in triumph, as if he came from conquering an enemy and not Frenchmen. He entered by the Faubourg Saint-Jacques with magnificent display.

The procession, led by symbolical cars, passed under a dozen triumphal arches, on which all the gods of Olympus were celebrating the unnumbered virtues of Louis the Victorious. An immense throng stationed along the whole route of the procession rent the air with their enthusiastic acclamations, greeting the conqueror's return.

D'Artagnan took possession of his rank. Porthos left the service, and during the following year married Madame Coquenard. The coffer so eagerly coveted contained 800,000 livres.

Mousqueton had a magnificent livery, and enjoyed the satisfaction for which he had yearned all his life—of standing behind a gilded carriage.

Aramis, after a long absence in Lorraine, suddenly disappeared and ceased to write his friends. They learned, long afterwards, through Madame de Chevreuse, who told it to two or three of her lovers, that he had decided to assume the habit in a religious house at Nancy.

Bazin became a lay brother.

Athos remained a musketeer under D'Artagnan's command till the year 1631, when, after a journey which he made to Touraine, he also quitted the service, under the pretext of having just inherited a small property in Roussillon.

Grimaud followed Athos.

D'Artagnan fought three times with Rochefort, and wounded him three times.

"I shall probably kill you the fourth," said he to him, holding out his hand to assist him to rise.

"Then it is better for you and for me that we stop here," answered the wounded man. "Zounds! I am much more your friend than you think; for after our very first encounter, I could, by saying a word to the cardinal, have had your head cut off!"

This time they heartily shook hands, and without retaining any malice.

Planchet obtained from Rochefort the rank of sergeant in the guards.

M. Bonacieux lived on very quietly, perfectly ignorant of what had become of his wife, and caring very little about the matter. One day he had the imprudence to recall himself to the cardinal's memory. The cardinal sent him word that he would see to it that he should never want for anything in future.

In fact, the next day M. Bonacieux left his house at seven o'clock in the evening to go to the Louvre, and he was never seen again in the Rue des Fossoyeurs. The opinion of those who seemed to be the best informed was that he was fed and lodged in some royal castle, at the expense of his generous Eminence.





